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PROPHETS OF THE  
BETTER HOPE

**Nihil Obstat**

ARTHURUS J. SCANLAN, S.T.D.

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# PROPHETS OF THE BETTER HOPE

BY

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of America and Trinity College  
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WITH A FOREWORD  
BY THE RIGHT REVEREND BISHOP  
THOMAS J. SHAHAN

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TO  
THE MEMORY OF  
**Thomas Bouquillon**  
TEACHER, SCHOLAR, PRIEST, FRIEND  
“ OMNE FASTIGIVM  
VIRTUTE IMPLET ”





## PREFACE

THE contents of this volume appeared as a series of articles in the *Ecclesiastical Review* at irregular intervals during recent years. They were undertaken as preliminary studies in preparation of a systematic discussion of temperament and character in the priest. The author has had no opportunity either to complete the original plan or to revise and expand the articles which appeared. The publishers feel, however, that it is worth while to reprint the series in its present form. It is hoped that the lack of uniformity in style and treatment which may be noted will not interfere seriously with the purpose that gave rise to the original plan and led to the publication of the articles which have appeared. The author takes occasion to thank the editor of the *Ecclesiastical Review* for his generosity in not only permitting but also encouraging the publication of the articles in book form.

THE AUTHOR.



## FOREWORD

THE many appreciative readers of Dr. Kerby's articles on the priesthood, as they appeared from time to time during recent years, will rejoice that they are now accessible in book form. Though more or less detached and independent, there runs through them, nevertheless, a colorful thread of unity which amply warrants their republication. Despite our rich literature on the priesthood, illustrating with learning and authority its exacting work, efforts to restate priestly perfection in the practical terms of everyday life will be always welcome. While zeal for an ideal priesthood might lead us at times to find fault with priests in a discouraging way, the priest himself is the first to welcome and to profit by criticism no less kindly in spirit than practical in form.

In these essays Dr. Kerby is both encouraging and helpful, and in a quite new and attractive manner he appeals for a generous confidence which will be given him in a high degree. Throughout these essays, like an undercurrent, runs a sympathetic understanding of the spirit and ideal of the priesthood, also a wholesome appreciation of the quiet spiritual heroism so common among our priests. It is pleasing to note the constant recurrence of the great basic truth of

Christian perfection, namely, that the highest idealism lies hidden in the commonplace details of duty. One is helped to understand as Cardinal Newman helped us to understand, that men and not angels are the ministers of the Gospel. The constant appeal for personal sanctity, for tender care of chosen souls, and for refined personal culture, loses no force by reason of the practical human sympathy that lights up every page.

The reader is ever thrown back upon himself in a way to promote reflection and self-knowledge. He is reminded that the standards of priestly character are authoritative and insistent in proportion as they are linked up with the practical demands of the ministry. At all times the ingenuity of the priesthood has been heavily taxed in order to reconcile the demands of personal piety with the tedious duties of the ministry. One may be wholly pious and yet fail in many ways as a practical guide of souls. One may be a measurably successful director of souls, and at the same time be indifferent to that growth in the high spiritual life which is obligatory on the priest. Hence, all efforts to reconcile in a practical way the demands of priestly holiness with the requirements of the pastoral calling are to be commended greatly.

The approval which these articles won in their original form permits us to hope that the author's efforts to detach and elevate the great spiritual essentials of the priestly life have been successful and that



his priestly readers will easily recognize beneath all comment and interpretation, all comparison and suggestion, the age-old doctrine and discipline on which Holy Church has trained her priesthood since Saint Paul himself first set forth the theory and the practice of the priestly life. Many readers of these pages were taken with their fine literary flavor and admired their freshness and bonhomie, also the light free touch of hard realities and the luminous comment that never lacked courage or truth. Necessarily grave in style, subtle humor pervades the work and lends it a grace and distinction of its own.

It may be added that there could scarcely be a better preparation for such a work than the author's intimate familiarity with the entire field of modern social science, and his wide experience in the treatment of its many problems. With the great new forces of thought and action, so subtly and powerfully transformative of the old order of life, the Catholic priesthood, needless to say, has many points of contact that in these pages stand out in sharp and clear outline.

✠ THOMAS J. SHAHAN.

*Rector of the Catholic  
University of America.*



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PROPHETS OF THE BETTER  
HOPE

*“There is indeed a setting aside of the former commandment, because of the weakness and unprofitableness thereof: (For the law brought nothing to perfection) but a bringing in of a better hope by which we draw nigh to God.”—HEBREWS, VII, 18, 19.*

## I

### THE PERSONAL INFLUENCE OF THE PRIEST

**O**RDINATION confers upon the priest the power of accomplishing certain supernatural results. By virtue of it, he administers the sacraments which are efficacious channels of grace. Their efficacy is limited only by the disposition of the recipient. The priest obtains through ordination the power also of official prayer. He is technically the representative of the Church, the mediator who brings God to man and man to God through the course of normal spiritual processes. His official acts of prayer and worship are effective by virtue of his priestly office. Without a doubt that effectiveness is increased through his personal integrity and the spiritual zeal that is lodged in his heart. Some of the activities of the priest are therefore efficacious in and of themselves, regardless of his personal merit. Others are more or less efficacious according to his merit and spiritual zeal. This difference is suggested by the well-known phrases, *ex opere operato* and *ex opere operantis*.

There is the third form of power exercised by the priest which is distinct from these two. It is that of personal influence. A priest diminishes or enhances his value to the priesthood and his service to souls

as he displays personal traits that are repellent or attractive in a human way to those with whom he deals. Manner, views, actions, motives, as they appear in his life, unite in producing an impression which conditions unfailingly his rôle in the world. Personal influence is a subtle form of power acquired without willing it and exercised largely free from the priest's control. This occurs because it relates to an attitude on the part of others and to traits in ourselves. Human hearts possess an instinct by which they demand in a leader purity of motive, unselfishness of spirit, tact, sympathy, and insight. When these are found in a leader, his subjects offer to him obedience, love, and trust. They insist on finding their security in his wisdom, their firmness in his strength, their loyalty to ideals in his noble proclamation of them. The power of personal influence is acquired not because we aim at it but because it results from what we are and what others find in us. It is a grace freely given. Such priestly influence imparts to the whole range of spiritual life in the people a joyousness and wholesome security that are incomparably attractive. No priest can with good conscience be indifferent to his influence on the lives of others. That influence should come at all times within the scope of his anxious care. A priest is conspicuous in his community by reason of training, office, spiritual power, and personal influence. He is obliged before God to make reasonable effort to exert only such influence upon the lives of others as

will bring happiness to them, honor to God, and spiritual peace to himself.

A priest may be popular without exercising the type of personal influence now held in mind. There are priests who obtain popularity at the heavy cost of dignity. One of this type is easily deceived. The people are glad to meet him, to speak with him, to be singled out for attention. But his power ends there. The priest who has the grace of real personal influence invites trust and pledges his admirers to generous consecration to the law of God and the spirit of His holy service. Personal influence is the soul of all sympathetic leadership in the world. We look up toward men thus gifted, eager to obey them, glad to be advised by them, grateful when taught of them. The people know that when doubt harasses them, release is sure if they can but lean on such a priest. They know that when hard battles with temptation must be fought and the standard of spiritual integrity is in danger, the views of such a priest or even the thought of him will turn the tide of battle and give promise of victory. Wisdom, decision, skill in charting pathways through spiritual mazes are among the gifts that heaven gives to a priest of this type. The words of the Gospel take on new meaning as they fall from his lips. The sanctions of the divine law take on appealing charm in answer to his touch. The attractiveness of the moral and spiritual ideals of life acquire new force as he raises his hand in benediction. The thought of such a priest is infinitely

comforting to hearts that lean on him. No one imputes to him an unworthy motive or a selfish thought. He accomplishes by noble aim and pure intention much that some seek to achieve through meanness and indirection. His admonitions are taken kindly. The purity of his motives, the excellence of his judgment, the foresight of his wisdom, and the firmness of his strength, hinder all resentment when he chides, disarm all opposition when he leads, and protect him against all suspicion and misrepresentation.

The example and teaching of a priest who has the gift of personal influence become part of the current conversation in the little world which he governs. The mention of his name starts gladness to the eye. It is as music to the ear. A priest of this type helps every father and every mother in the parish in the work of rearing their children. His character reenforces every noble lesson, every moral precept found in the traditions of Christianity and transmitted in Christian homes to little children. Such a priest is present in every heart and soul by inspiration and example. He becomes a loved member of every Christian household. His shadow across the threshold of a home is as a pathway over which joy and peace and strength and faith enter to take up their dwelling within. The thought of him, the appeal of him, is part of everyone's virtue, part of everyone's self-respect, part of everyone's standard of honor and character. Who shall count the lives pledged to everything that is



noble through the silent action of the personal influence of a priest of this type? Who shall count the sinners won back to God by the searching power of his example? There is nothing good or wholesome in his community that is not enriched by the thought of him and reenforced by his presence or his word. There is not a form of malice or sin that is not ashamed and self-accused in his presence or within the sound of his name. Inferiority forgets its lowliness when he is near. Superiority excuses its arrogance in his presence. All ask themselves whence come the tact, the wisdom, and certain strength that set such a priest apart from the rest of men and lift him in familiar eminence above us. Whence this miracle that enables a priest to perform the feats of strength through gentleness, to achieve the tasks of mastery by self-surrender, to dominate a community by abdicating all pretence to power? Whence comes it that by never asking advancement, all precedence is forced upon him? Whence comes it that weapons forged in heaven seem so powerful in his hands, so ineffective in ours? Whence is it that self-respect and kindness, self-discipline and piety are possible to him in spite of a busy life that is not without its humor and relaxations, when many of us feel that touch with the lower interests of life is to be obtained only at the surrender of the higher.

Personal influence is not conditioned by learning, for we find it among those who are by no means conspicuous for ability or training. We find it some-



times among children, among busy men, above all among busy Christian mothers. Goodness alone does not insure it. All of us have known types of goodness that repelled us. Was it cynic or historian who invented the phrase "pious crank"? A certain little girl prayed more wisely than she knew, when she asked God to make all bad people good and good people nice. At any rate, many of us have known good people who were not nice. Their personal influence was not helpful in the weary struggle toward the kingdom of God. Although personal influence is not conditioned on learning, yet learning adds to it very greatly. While it does not necessarily accompany goodness, it can not be genuine except when goodness is present. While it does not necessarily follow from the priestly office, when found associated with that office, there results one of the noblest forms of power that the world can know.

A silent revolution is now going on in the world, of which we priests have been slow to take account, although it bears directly on us. Changes in leadership have placed a most exacting challenge before us. That challenge touches us directly in our own personal influence over the faithful and in the community in which we live.

There was an amiable, well-educated priest in a Western state who boasted to his friends that he was the best-posted and ablest man in his county. The priest is no longer the best-posted or ablest man in his community. There are in all cities many types

of leadership with which the priest can no longer compete. We find in the business and professional worlds, one type of superiority. We find in public and political life, another. We find among our educators many types of superior leadership. The American public is disposed to accept leaders without credentials of any kind if they have the gifts of the orator and the conviction of a message. It is on account of general carelessness in examining the credentials of leaders, that radicalism of all kinds is able to produce so many. And these leaders are able to steal away from us very many whom we have had under our care for years with every opportunity to influence and train them.

Now, as the French proverb has it, one may be sharper than another but one cannot be sharper than everybody. The superiority of the priest in his own community is overtopped at many points. The members of his own parish are in constant touch with other types of leadership. They do not fail to make comparisons and to draw inferences. There is a general tendency to measure leaders not by what they claim to be but by what they are. No one can find fault with this. Although the priest may be in contrast with abler scholars, with more gifted organizers and really eminent orators, he will have no competitor to dispute his power or challenge his leadership or impugn his wisdom when God adds to the tremendous power of the priestly office the gift of personal influence. No charm in any other type of

leadership can ever weaken the loyalty of the faithful when they count a priest of this type as their leader. The case could not be otherwise. The heart of the world throbs in harmony with the eternal truths that underlie existence. The race believes in spiritual ideals that are nobler and more enduring than any transitory object of human ambition. The herald of those ideals will never be without his own secure eminence when his equipment and merit are worthy of his office.

One finds little satisfaction in attempting to describe personal influence. It is elusive. It defies analysis. It can be felt and recognized when it cannot be described. The work of the critic is less exacting. One may enumerate certain traits that destroy personal influence. And one may with ease examine one's conscience in respect of them.

No priest who is selfish will have this gift. He will have the power of his office. He will have the moral power that accompanies his technical leadership in his parish. He may even have a certain following in whose eyes his selfishness takes on the color of virtue. But a selfish priest, whose aims and judgments are selfish, who thinks of his work and does it in reference to some self-seeking purpose, will never know the charm of personal influence or the reach of its imperial sway over human hearts. Kipling expresses this thought in *The Light that Failed*. "The instant we begin to think about success and the

effect of our work, to play with one eye on the gallery, we lose power and touch and everything else. If we make light of our work by using it for our own ends, our work will make light of us. Success isn't got by sacrificing other people. You must sacrifice yourself and live under orders and never think of yourself." The instinct of the people refuses to trust selfishness, although they are often slow in discovering it. It may be refined as well as crude, subtle no less than brutal. It is selfish to prefer one's comfort to one's duty; to do as little as possible for others; to chill sympathy into indifference and zeal into caution; to insist on precedence and recognition in all circumstances. It is selfish to be keenly conscious of rights and privileges and only dimly conscious of duty and opportunity. Out of these finer forms of selfishness come resentment, pessimism, shirking of duty, self-assertion, all of which are traits that the world refuses to trust. They hurt seriously the personal influence of a priest and diminish the force of every appeal that he makes in the interest of spiritual ideals. We have much to learn from George Eliot's description of Felix Holt. "His strong health, his renunciation of selfish claims, his habitual preoccupation with large thoughts and with purposes independent of everyday casualties, secured for him a fine and even temper, free from moodiness or irritability."

A priest who lacks a clearly-defined sense of justice will be without personal influence. One who is un-



fair, whose standards are colored by prejudice, who uses his exalted office to punish those in disagreement with him, and is guilty of discrimination by favoritism, shows that no impersonal ideals of justice inhabit his soul. The instinct for justice is universal. Even those who benefit by injustice are never freed from the feeling of guilt. Resentment kills the sense of justice. It acts like poison. It falsifies standards and vitiates thinking. It puts a blemish on every virtue that it touches. The *Jungle Book* tells that in the law of the jungle, once an offence has been punished, it is totally overlooked or forgotten. There is no surviving resentment. Such a law might honor the priesthood. No priestly heart can refuse faithful obedience to every dictate of justice and to every propriety by which the interests of justice are safeguarded. The priest who is unjust will have little of the personal influence which means so much to his exalted office.

A priest who is without genuine human sympathy will lack personal influence. One who is curt in speech, too reserved in manner, reluctant to express emotion, ashamed of his sentiments and unwilling to do anything that appears to be sentimental, will diminish his personal influence when he does not destroy it. The priest is sent to grieve with those who suffer and to be glad with those who rejoice. He must have an understanding heart. He must invite confidence and give strength. He must be one whose touch brings consolation, whose word is the messenger of help, whose insight points the way

through struggle, doubt, and sin. Through sympathy chiefly, comes understanding, that subtle approach of mind to mind, of heart to heart, of feeling to feeling, which is like an osmotic process that mingles the hidden and varied experiences of human hearts in one commonly shared treasure.

A sense of humor will be found in a priest who has the gift of personal influence. He will have understanding for the playfulness of life. He will be quick to note the incongruities that minister to our laughter. He will appreciate the divine warrant for the humor that helps us to look through the clouds to the sunlight beyond and to find in that vision relief for weary hearts. The gift of humor gives to leaders and to office just that elasticity that makes authority charming.

If the gift of humor is not rare, discretion in the use of it is rare. It is difficult to hinder the sense of humor from degenerating into a taste for comedy, to prevent the smile of a wise man from becoming the grin of the clown. Humor is just as delightful as indiscriminate wit is ugly. The former imparts atmosphere, suggests a point of view, a way of seeing things as they are and of detecting pleasant surprises to our logic, to our dignities, and our illusions. It indicates a happy compromise between the claims of time and of eternity, between dignity and simplicity, work and play, each of which is part of the composite of life and is intended by God to play its part in the work of our sanctification. Good people

who have lacked a sense of humor have done no little harm in the world. Priests who lack a sense of humor make life very difficult for members of their congregations. Priests who lack discretion in their sense of humor surrender their dignity and diminish the prestige of their exalted office.

Common sense will do much to enhance the personal influence of a priest. Francis Thompson says: "High sanctity, like genius, contrary to the vulgar notion, is eminently commonsensible." Perhaps we differ in our definitions of common sense. Ruskin calls it "practical insight into the things which are of instant and constant need to men." Without discussing definitions, we may assume that common sense is nothing in the world other than objective judgment. It is the ability to rate at their relative value all of the factors or circumstances in any situation, to balance them over against one another, to reach a decision and base upon it a policy. It is the work of common sense to balance the conflicting claims that enter into everyday life. It is its business not to overrate the spiritual nor to underrate it; not to overrate the temporal nor underrate it; not to overrate the playfulness of life nor to underrate it. Common sense neither overrates nor underrates anything in life. It seeks and aims to follow the perfect balance among the objects of valuation and desire which touch our lives at any point. A priest who is too subjective, errs against common sense. One who is "touchy," errs against common sense because he



overrates the importance of his temperament and feelings in the cosmic order. One who fails to make allowances for the limitations of life and for the average of action and motive in circles with which one deals, will be at fault in judgment and uncertain in advice. In this he will offend against common sense. Much of what St. Thomas tells us concerning the function of prudence among the virtues, may be said of the function of common sense in everyday life.

A priest who would have the gift of personal influence must be a supernatural man. The spiritual forces of the world must be real to him. He must live close to the eternities. The touch of God must be about everything that he says and everything that he does. The instinct of the faithful makes them keen in measuring the depth and quality of a priest's holiness. That instinct discovers to them with sure enunciation the evidences of inner piety that are associated in their minds with the standards of the priesthood. No priest who is not a man of interior life will have this gift of personal influence in its noblest form. Only interior life can release us from the tyranny of circumstance or from the risk of placing our happiness in recognition or relations over which we have no control. The priest whose joys and griefs lie in things that are under the control of others or whose affections assemble around honor, recognition, and power that is at the disposal of others, will meet disappointment and feel resentment and be unhappy with enduring regrets. But when

the interior life is deep and God is known and His ways are loved and His valuations become the law of life, all will go well in the priestly heart. When the priest's standards of judgment and action, of joy and sorrow, find their law and measure in his own sanctified heart, then he will have peace and strength through all his days. When the interior life is genuine, one will not warp an attitude to suit a prejudice nor trim a principle to protect an ambition. One will understand with happiness the supreme law of renunciation, formulated with cunning wisdom by a colored woman, "Not wanting things is better than having them." Happiness is within our own power when our lives are rightly ordered. Ruskin tells us, "Happiness is in little things—if anywhere—but it is essentially within one and being within seems to fasten on little things." The supernatural interior life brings happiness, declares the consecration of a priest, and draws for him from the faithful the confidence and happy obedience that are the solid foundations of his power.

It is a much more pleasant task to study the priest whose life shows the blessed power of personal influence than to examine the life of one who lacks it. Each of us is to a great extent responsible for temperament, manner, and action. When these operate to chill piety or discourage confidence, to awaken resentment or weaken resolution or shatter spiritual loyalty in the hearts of the faithful, God holds us to a

strict accounting. The average priest is able to guess with fair accuracy whether his personal influence over the faithful is helping souls or causing them distress. Perhaps the habit of self-examination would discover to us failings at this point to which we might give attention with profit to ourselves and to the faithful. There is, however, another form of personal influence that merits passing attention. Every priest has a right to his limitations of ability, and in a sense, of temperament. God intends our fixed limitations to protect us. We at times through false attitudes permit them to worry us. No priest should at any time go beyond the protecting lines of his limitations in what he aspires to do or in what he attempts. If a priest feel that he has no ability to do any work outside of his parish, he will be wise in confining himself to his parish. But he should make sure that his certainty is born of intelligent zeal and not of laziness. The priest who finds time and opportunity for wider action in the larger world, should feel called upon to take his place there and throw the power of his influence to the support of the moral and spiritual ideals of his faith and country.

In the Church, as in the world at large, progress depends on a law of surplus service. The priest who is willing to think, worry, struggle and plan for the larger impersonal welfare of God and Church, is the chief promise that we have of the progress of spiritual truth in the world. Service over and above what is named in the bond; service given generously and

without compensation, given because of spontaneous ideals, generous impulses, and far-reaching zeal, conditions all forward movement in the world. Every man who has the capacity of surplus service, who has the gift and grace of wider solicitude drawn from great ideals, becomes a power in the larger world and symbolizes the forces that make for righteousness and peace. The priest who identifies himself with the wider life of his time is like a sensitive organ through which the Church becomes aware of currents in the world about her and is enabled to adapt herself to changing times. Perhaps the founders of religious communities of both men and women had this vision and this impulse. Those priests who find it possible to identify themselves with the larger interests of Church and country, who free themselves from the chilling effects of parochialism, become the crowning glory of the Church, the most powerful vindication of her exalted claims. In this type of priest we find the largest sweep of the graces of personal influence and the divine last touch added to priestly power.



## II

### THE YOUNG PRIEST AND HIS ELDERS

MUCH of the wisdom and happiness of a priest depends on his attitude toward fellow-priests. The priesthood constitutes a class apart in our Catholic life. "Elevation is separation." Not all of the rich and wonderful experience that a priest enjoys as adviser and friend in every kind of situation and with every type of life prevents him from feeling more or less apart from the people. Nor does it hinder the people from feeling their separateness from him. He is set apart for the service of the sanctuary. The normal stream of confidences or play of association is within the priesthood itself. Here and there the space that separates clergy from laity is bridged by circumstance, but the whole drift of the clerical life receives its character and approved direction within the priesthood, just as the spontaneous expressions of the life of the laity occur normally in their own circles.

No priest enhances his prestige or increases his effectiveness by laying aside his distinctive point of view and merging into the laity as almost one of them. The people ask that we be men of understanding heart, of sympathy, and resourcefulness; that we be lead-

ers; that we be just, prudent, tactful, of easy approach, and of gentlemanly instinct always. But they do not ask and they do not welcome the surrender of our distinctive consciousness, the forfeiture of our priestly reserve or the cheapening of that dignity with which we should adorn our office. The deeper instinct of the laity offers to us a more exacting habit of reserve, rule of speech and action than any diocesan synod would attempt. If the priest who is inclined to find fault with the traditional reserves of his office or to think it manly to lay them aside, would bring an open mind to the analysis of Catholic instinct, he would discover in the Catholic heart, as part of its reverence and trust, an insistent longing to see him sustain the reserves that have made the priesthood honorable.

The companionships and associations of a priest are determined in simple and natural ways. Sometimes class bonds formed in the seminary endure and attachments growing out of them survive the test of years and ripen into comforting and helpful experiences. To a great extent, friendships fall within the limits of the clergy of the diocese. Within the diocese, temperament and like-mindedness play a rôle in determining companionship. Clerical friends "drop in" for dinner or an evening chat. On the whole, the amount of time given by the average priest to companionship or association with other priests is extremely limited. The average pastor in a large city is held to almost uninterrupted attention to the

thousand details of parish management and spiritual direction of the congregation. Problems of finance, intricacies of school management, meetings of parish associations, wider activities growing out of parish relations, constant visits from members of the parish who need advice, and search for those that are going astray, consume much of the time and energy of a faithful priest. Thus it happens that he is driven to take attitudes toward his fellow-priests instead of enjoying extended association and leisure with them.

Chance meetings at retreats or conferences, at funerals or Church feasts, are, after all, but chance meetings. They are hurried. They offer opportunity for nothing but superficial contact and exchange of the ordinary courtesies of life. The number of leisure hours available to the average city priest during which he can sit with his friend in refreshing quiet and express his soul in reminiscence, in the interpretation of the drift of things, in comment on literature or the bearings of larger events that affect the Christian philosophy of life, is almost negligible. But at all times, it is possible for the busy priest to have communion with himself, to have an undisturbed quiet hour when he "loafs and invites his soul." In times like these, he has opportunity to reflect upon the impressions that he has formed concerning his fellow-priests. Only in times of such quiet self-examination shall we discover the mistakes that we make in false impressions concerning fellow-priests and the wisdom



that we display in accurate impressions concerning them.

One of the most important questions that is suggested by these thoughts relates to the reciprocal attitudes found among young priests and their elders. Each tends to develop a traditional attitude toward the other. Each is more influenced by his impressions of the other than by his actual experience. There are young priests. There are typical young priests. There are elderly priests. There are typical elderly priests. The attitude of each toward the other is of fundamental importance because a right attitude means brotherly union, mutual helpfulness, and joy, while a mistaken attitude leads to estrangement, false judgment, and even unhappiness. Since, therefore, the priest's life is lived largely within priestly circles and since here he has experience of companionship with impressions of priests more regularly than with priests themselves, we are held to greatest care in watching our impressions of one another and in holding firmly to the standards of common sense and charity in the attitudes that we take. This will be shown by a review of the relations that are to be found between the young priest and his elders.

We classify one another by age. We speak of the young, the middle-aged, and the old. Scientists prefer to classify us nowadays by mental conditions and processes rather than by years. When we speak of a young priest, we have in mind not alone the years

of youth, but also outlook on life, impulses that are active, illusions that are revered, standards that are cherished, valuations that are accepted, the quality of zeal that is looked upon as duty, and the rule of sacrifice that is accepted as law. When we speak of an elderly priest, we have in mind the impulses that experience has chilled into slumber, no less than those which survive; the illusions that have been forfeited to the exactions of time and those that have taken their place; practical attitudes towards ideals, practical understanding of what is possible and what is impossible, of what is worth doing and of what is not worth doing; settled judgment of the serious joys of life and rejection of the lesser joys that betray the young; in a word, all of those opinions and standards that have survived the onslaught of years and have become the settled axioms of practical wisdom governing our final attitudes toward life.

Practically all elderly priests take a certain attitude toward young priests that may be expressed in terms more or less like those just stated. Young priests have an analogous attitude toward their elders which may be expressed in the same way. The elderly priest expects the average young priest to act according to this impression. The latter expects the elderly priest to act true to it. Thus each is inclined to judge the other through an attitude already taken. He does not hold the attitude subject to knowledge and judgment of the single priest. Now, a right attitude in either toward the other will

bring much happiness, much joyful association and reinforcing spiritual experience. A mistaken attitude in either toward the other will color outlook, mislead emotions, disturb the sense of accurate human values, and destroy that refined spiritual association which knows no reserve except that of prudence and no caution except that of reverent love. A wise observer has said that the best proof of the wisdom of an elderly man is found in his attitude toward younger men. When the former has reverence for youth and interest in its visions, he triumphs over the cynical ravages of time and gives proof of a wholesome attitude toward life. The process that intervenes to change the alert zeal of the young priest into the moderated enthusiasm and sober emotion that we shall find in him thirty years later, offers a key to the interior history of the priesthood. The process repeats itself with unfailing regularity. A fair observer may predict with some exactness the way in which seventy out of every hundred young priests will develop in thirty years.

The young priest who comes from the seminary to take his place in the vineyard of the Lord, represents the average product of the action of the seminary on the receptive temperament of a man called to the priesthood. The seminarian placed himself under the play of spiritual, intellectual, and social influences which tested and chastened his ambitions, rearranged his valuations, reconstructed his outlook, and

equipped him with the beginnings of habits which are to be the citadel of his soul in his warfare with evil. The seminarian learned systematic forms of prayer and self-examination. He was put in touch with the traditions of the spiritual life, with the principles and authorities that are held in reverent esteem. Effort was made to awaken spiritual longings which are intended to be the foundations of character, the sources of piety and insight into the spiritual realities that are the alphabet of priestly life. The silver jubilee of the young priest's ordination will show that many changes have occurred. The guidance of dreams will be replaced by the maxims of experience. The enthusiasms of youth will be checked by the caution of age. The intense personal attitudes of untried zeal will yield place to the routine views of a busy man. Nothing seemed impossible to the young priest on the day of his ordination. Much will seem impossible on the day of his silver jubilee. The thoroughness of personal piety and sureness of devotion to great ideals will have been subjected to the acid tests of life, work, and liberty. Much will have been surrendered and much will have been acquired during the intervening years. What is the type of young priest as he begins his work? What is the type of elderly priest when much of his work is done? What is the attitude of each toward the other?

The young priest has an undimmed and inspiring vision of souls. He sees the world peopled with souls. His spiritual impulses are alert. A sweet inner com-



pulsion sustains him in his eagerness to seek out and minister to souls and win for them the enriching grace of God. The reality of the spiritual forces of life masters imagination. Doctrines are convictions quivering with life, drawn from the remotest fastnesses of the heart. The seminary aims at this result. Everything in its routine proclaims the soul, the supremacy of the moral interests of life, the all-searching presence of the spirit of God, the reality of the spiritual forces of the world. Sensitiveness to moral and spiritual duties should be the outcome of this seminary process. Adverse influences are shut out as far as they can be shut out and the work of transforming man into priest, student into apostle, youth into sage, continues, helped only or hindered only by the deliberate choice of the seminarian himself. There is something that falls just short of ecstasy in the vision that greets the purified eye of a newly consecrated priest. He is vividly conscious of the sacredness of his office, of the sanctions of his power, of moral peril to souls, and of his divine commission to protect them. He sees grace as a vital force, the sacraments as the comforting symbols of the redeeming work of God, sin as the one catastrophe of the universe, virtue as the supreme conditioning interest of life. This vision is serene, certain, over-mastering. The young priest is unhampered by the tyrannies that will later obscure it. Imagination is not yet dulled by experience. Effort is not yet hampered by routine; zeal has not yet been made cynical

through doubt. He is protected by the splendid illusions concerning human nature which are always found in noble young men. He has not yet discovered how rebellious human nature may be, how subtle in evil, how discouraging in weakness, how flippant in sin, how reckless in sinning. It is indeed refreshing for those of us who have ceased to take an interest in the vanishing memories of our own youthful visions to discover in the young priest an exhilarating revelation of the way in which we once felt and hoped, and loved our high ideals.

The young priest takes his knowledge from books and dreams, not from life and experience. He brings with him into the priesthood a fondness for books, familiarity with them, and a considerable range of positive information that shows itself in his tastes and conversation. He is technically exact with the rubrics, scrupulously careful in administering the sacraments and precise with every formula. He does not yet know his own limitations nor the protection that he should derive from them. He does not recognize the elusiveness of evil, the rebellious independence of the human heart or the subtle forces that will neutralize his gentlest ministrations. The fine enthusiasms of youth and its freedom from bitterness or impulsive discouragement are prolific sources of hope and effort. The young priest has, as the scientists say, a "low glow point"; that is, it requires but little to stir interest into fiery enthusiasm or the sense of duty into restless zeal for souls. When he is pro-

tected by humility, moderated by prudence, and gifted with a docile heart, he offers us the fairest picture vouchsafed to man of the blended mastery of nature and grace in human life.

Our younger colleague pays the cost of his privileges. He is easily discouraged. Disappointment merges quickly into resentment. He is slow to recognize any kind of wisdom except that which is contained in his class-room formulae. The young priest is slow to discover that routine is inevitable, that system is necessary, and that his intensely personal attitude toward spiritual duties must surrender to the limitations of both. He drifts easily into a critical attitude toward his elder colleagues because he judges them by his own wisdom and not by theirs. He is greatly influenced by ideas, principles and theory, and he lacks the practical gift of adapting these to the inevitable limitations of life. He underrates the practical wisdom of his elders because it is a kind of wisdom that he himself does not possess. When he fails to recognize the limitations of his own type and the sure resources of the elderly priest, he ceases to find inspiration in the wisdom or guidance in the practical judgment of the latter. There is always danger that a young priest will adopt disparaging judgment of elder priests as a whole, taking on an air of offensive superiority that little becomes any young man. When this occurs, he becomes intolerant because of inexperience and zeal, always a dangerous combination. By expecting too much of the



only kind of bookish perfection that he knows, the young priest unfits himself to find any kind of practical working perfection which the elderly priest may have achieved. It is strange indeed that some young priests fail to understand how much charm a docile spirit and a sense of situation can impart to life. The young always judge their elders severely.

Early in his career the young priest is exposed to the operation of forces that begin to transform him into the more practical man. Countless duties take up his time. He lives less and less with books, more and more among the people. The noble illusions that fed his enthusiasm begin to dissipate themselves when he finds how successfully evil can resist him, how frequently he will be deceived, and how often he will find no compensation but ingratitude for his devotion. Step by step the change goes on. Zeal is chilled by failures. Routine commences to rob his soul of the resiliency that once constituted its promise and its charm. Ideals grow dim, and habits of personal piety are endangered. The intensely personal attitudes toward work tend to become attitudes dictated by routine and system. Some deceitful success in preaching without preparation may lead the young priest to believe that his abilities enable him to dispense with labor in preparing sermons. He becomes a busy priest among busy priests. He adapts himself to his environment. He gradually surrenders his personal preferences and his cherished tastes to take on those of the atmosphere

in which he lives. At this point, the challenge to piety and common sense becomes supreme. Difficulties will result from the sometimes good-humored and sometimes ill-humored comment that elderly priests make on the enthusiasms, the manners, and the standards of youth. With the process of change well begun in a manner something like this, we may leave our younger colleague at this point and seek him out at the time of his silver jubilee.

The first discovery that we make in the life of an elderly priest is that it is entirely systematized. He lives by routine. He has more duties than time, more good will than energy, more activities than resources. Hope in the young priest bends life to his ideas. Experience in the elderly priest subjects his ideas to life. Longing for mastery over life makes way for the patient wisdom of surrender to the limitations of life. The experience of the elderly priest in dealing with the complexities of spiritual leadership compels him to take a stand toward all duties that represents his best judgment in reconciling irreconcilables. He is so harried by claims on time and energy that the experience of no one seems to aid him much. He must work out his own problems in his own way. In doing so, he makes his surrenders and determines on the surviving reverences that furnish inspiration to his spirit and standards to his judgment.

The heart of the elderly priest has known the worries of finance and the subtleties of evil as they endanger young and old. It has carried the griefs and

burdens of those who venerate him, who cling to him and seek release from their own uncertainties and sin in the security of his decisiveness, wisdom and strength. He is compelled to spend himself in doing many things and in doing few of them with a thoroughness that he would like. The manner in which his day is cut up makes him a stranger to consecutive reading. He loses his taste for books. In the endeavor to keep informed on many lines, he does much aimless reading and some useless reading that gives him neither insight, judgment, nor culture. Inroads are made on time that he would gladly reserve for recreation, reading, social intercourse, and prayer. He will get much of his exercise while walking about in the performance of duty or by taking walks late at night. The elderly good priest will display no little ingenuity in the fight to save his traditions of personal piety in the face of demands that almost forbid him to have any piety. Many a time while he is in the crowded streets going from place to place, his hand will steal into his coat pocket, that dear familiar chapel from which so many unsuspected rosaries take "through the boundless air their certain flight" to God.

Contact with the supernatural in administration of the Sacraments, in the celebration of Mass, in preaching and other acts of public worship, should of themselves be an unailing source of inspiration and purification to every priest. But crowded confessionals give rise to the mental attitude of hurry

which robs the confessional experience of much of the spiritual profit that the priest should find in it. The hurry that is associated with the management of Sunday Mass, the visitors who must be seen immediately after Mass, the details of parish business, forethought as to announcements, meetings of societies of all kinds that crowd in on the busy time, leave the priest strangely despoiled of the leisure and spirit so necessary to his traditions of piety and prayer. Routine is inevitable. Routine is system. System chills enthusiasm. Duties that are repeated day after day will sometimes lack the technical finish and dignity of form with which the young priest is so familiar. The routine into which the average priest drifts is nothing other than his solution of the problem of reconciling his limitations and his duties. This development affects his ideals and his attitudes toward life and it becomes an interpretation of his sense of responsibility to souls. Hence it is that impulses are checked and zeal tends in all things to take on a deliberateness, if not apathy, that seems inexcusable to the intemperate energy of the younger priest. He has not yet learned his lesson because he has not yet faced the problem of life.

The careless sinner who stirs the younger colleague's soul into turbulent zeal, leaves the elderly priest calm if not unmoved. Opportunities for doing seemingly great things, prospect of which arouses the younger man to outspoken enthusiasm, awaken scarcely the passing notice of the elderly priest.



The latter has worked out his system of discount for impulses, while the former has not yet discovered that that must be done. In addition to routine and experience, the accepted view of the scope of the priesthood in human life that gradually develops becomes a factor of far-reaching influence. An elderly priest has already achieved himself, as the phrase is. He has made his contribution to the priesthood as a whole. He has survived his difficulties and dangers and has reached the placidity that success and certainty engender. Now, if he has a worthy view of the scope of the priesthood in the world, it will feed his enthusiasm and protect him against the narrowing influence of routine and the pessimism that comes from disappointment. Whatever a disinterested observer may think of the view of the priesthood as a whole, that is found among elderly priests, their younger colleague sometimes believes that they are narrow, lacking in inspiration, and too easily satisfied.

It is just possible that an accurate insight into the processes that occur in the transformation of a young into an elderly priest can be found in changing attitudes toward the duty of preaching. If the seminary has done its work well, it has convinced the young priest of the dignity and power of the spoken word. He has learned that it is one of the channels of the tradition of the Incarnation down the centuries. He has learned that there is no greater agency of power at his command than the pulpit. It invites all of the

enthusiasm that he can command, all of the talent that he can muster. Not even when his enthusiasm and talent are reenforced by labor and prayer shall the priest ever be too well prepared to stand before the waiting souls and act as the spokesman of God Himself. It is not surprising that the well-trained young priest feels reverence for the duty of preaching and consecrates himself to it with uncomplaining industry. But after a time, when he must preach thirty, forty, fifty, or sixty times a year before the same congregation, changes occur. The young priest discovers that preaching is but one of many duties, and that when body is tired or mind is tired or attention is diverted, preparation becomes irksome and uninviting. It is not surprising that early in his career many a priest will depend on the "Dabitur tibi," that form of pleasant benediction given often to a priest who is called on to preach without preparation. Of course, if the preacher had leisure for reflection and painstaking study, he would test every sermon in the depths of his own soul before giving it forth as a divine message to the children of God. But when opportunity for personal, intimate preparation of sermons is lacking, the elderly priest may easily drift into a mental attitude that dispenses him from the duty of preparation and permits him to believe that he preaches as effectively without as with it. This error is fatal, of course, to real preaching. One can hardly expect the enriching



blessing of God to follow upon sermons that are not well prepared.

One cannot easily describe the complicated transition from the outlook of a young priest to that of an elderly colleague. Perhaps no two would estimate the beginning and the end in the same way or agree on the facts as regards either young priests or their elders. However the transition be described, we must admit that the surrender of the graces of youth or the translation of them into the ripened wisdom of age will be accomplished sometimes wisely, sometimes unwisely. What is taken to be wisdom in the elderly priest may now and then be the hardening of sympathy that is twin brother to pessimism. We would be far happier if we could accumulate experience without hurt to our nobler illusions; if we could become wise without aid from the cynic, practical without ceasing to be exact, effective in life without forfeiture of ideals or surrender of the solacing charms of the library and scholarly leisure. But this may not be asked. Young priests who are spiritually minded, zealous, self-confident, inexperienced, who see and know only souls and are stirred by noble illusions, will continue to be transformed into elderly priests and will show forth in their several lives the varying wisdom of their transformation. Elderly priests will continue to be subjected to routine, to the distraction of multiplied duties and the limitations of life. There are sources of strength and in-

sight in each condition. But there are also dangers and limitations in each. The young priest and his elders cannot but be gainers if they will reflect with honest industry on their mutual obligations.

The elderly priest has a serious duty toward his younger colleague no less than toward the priesthood as a whole. He must realize, for instance, that the only new hope that comes into the priesthood, comes tabernacled in the hearts of young men. Youth alone carries with it the promise of new insight, of wholesome courage, and buoyant self-confidence. Mainly through the better training of young priests does the priesthood take advantage of improved methods of teaching, of new achievements of scholarship, of new insight into the forces that master life. Elderly men may do well in conserving, but to young men must we turn for the prospect of forging ahead. If we fail to take a wide vision of the priesthood, we shall quite overlook this providential function of our younger colleagues; but this intellectual rôle of the younger priests is not for the moment held in mind. What I wish to bring out relates to other aspects of priestly life which are of a more personal character.

The newly ordained priest has an undeniable touch of the prophet about him. Brotherly contact with a noble-minded young priest should be a definite grace to his elder colleague. The latter should renew his vision of souls through the eyes of the former.

Through them he should rediscover the spiritual forces that underlie God's judgment of the world. The fearlessness of young men, the enthusiasm and the superb confidence in priestly power that one meets in a good young priest, should give to his elder colleague new self-knowledge, new standards by which to test the piety of his own zeal and the firmness of his consecration. Any one of us may re-read the history of his own younger priesthood in the clear light of his mature experience, through the aims and emotions, the aspirations and standards of any typical young priest. But in order to do that we must look with reverence, with respect and kindness on the illusions and earnestness of the untried Levite. Nothing else in the world could stir so pleasantly the memories of our own forgotten days or awaken sleeping impulses and dormant memories that have become part of our eternity. All good men are reverent toward youth. All good men are willing to learn from the vision of youth. Elderly priests should be reverent toward young priests and should learn from them. A false attitude toward youth indicates a false attitude toward life. Not even the most glaring faults of any young priest can excuse a false attitude toward him in his elder colleague.

There are certain facts that we of the elder generation must accept without flinching. Young priests have their faults, but they have their virtues also. At times our criticisms are directed against their virtues as well as against their faults; not always,

but at times. Some of the faults of our younger colleagues are adopted in self-defence against us and our mistaken attitudes toward them. Some of their faults are the outcome of their virtues and temperament. I do not forget that youth may be irreverent and self-sufficient, nor that there are ignoble as well as noble natures among the young. I have no more desire to deify youth than I have to deify age. But if there are mistaken attitudes found between the younger priest and his elders, these latter will have to bear a large share of the fault. Their wisdom should show them how to help the younger colleagues through the rapids that await them. Their experience in dealing with all types of character should show them how to deal with the younger men from whom we may not ask any wisdom except that of youth. If we in the light of experience, grace and prayer cannot through example and advice protect our younger colleagues against their typical mistakes, while saving for them and for the priesthood the graces and vision of youth, the enthusiasm and spiritual instinct developed by careful training, we shall surely fall short of one of the offices of our priesthood. If we could but realize that some of the faults of our younger colleagues are adopted in self-defence against our mistakes in dealing with them, we might be helped in the painful duty of self-correction. There are not a few priests who explain lack of zeal, indifference to mental growth and a certain pessimistic discouragement, by the treatment



that they received from their elderly colleagues in the earlier days of their work in the vineyard of the Lord. When an elderly priest discovers in his younger colleague the promise of genius and abiding power and he goes repeatedly to the tabernacle to thank God for that promise and to protect those gifts by his prayers, we find active in him a noble spiritual ideal. And when the elder man is happy in receiving edification and in feeling stimulated to renewed zeal for personal sanctification and for service of souls through contact with younger priests, we find in him a man whose instincts are true, whose sense of values is right, whose heart's compass is rectified by the hand of God Himself.

It is well for the young priest at the outset of his career to show common sense in the attitude that he takes toward his elders. His life, like all human life, is a process of surrender and exchange. When he finds himself capable of suitable reverence toward his elders, frankly willing to learn from them and prompt to take their advice, all goes well. If the young priest will but understand his own individual limitations, those of his type and those of his outlook, he will dispose himself favorably to the development of the virtues which the world expects to be associated with the graces of youth. The young priest ought to learn to trust those who have gone before him and have measured up to the tests of life. It is due to inexperience that the young priest is inclined to be dogmatic, critical, and intolerant. Now,



he has no warrant in being either dogmatic or critical or intolerant. There is no warrant in his wisdom, for he has little of it; nor in achievement, for his life is as yet but promise; nor in character that has withstood the tests of life, since his character has not yet withstood those tests; nor in ripened virtue, since his virtues are largely those of sheltered youth rather than of well-trying age. Nothing can justify a young priest in being critical or dogmatic or intolerant toward his elders. Emerson is quoted as saying that when a young man is willing to accept the wisdom of elder people and abide by it, great things may be expected from him. Hence the young priest who looks for what is strong and right and helpful, for what is creditable and wholesome in the life of his elder colleagues, will be wise beyond his years.

Elderly priests are as they are and younger priests must accept them. They represent the average result achieved in the sacerdotal life in which the demands of heaven and of earth contend for time and mastery, putting on the often wearied heart a supreme test of wisdom, patience, and labor. That all elderly priests, singly and severally, might be nobler, wiser, and more efficient than they are, is beside the question. That they have faults is beside the question. Our concern for the moment is to make sure that the young priest take for his own sake, as well as for the sake of the priesthood, a right attitude toward his elderly colleague. Rarely indeed will there be anything in elderly priests as a whole that can excuse



cynical attitudes, superior airs, or chronic fault-finding in a younger man. None of these practices lose any of their ugliness—indeed it is but intensified by contrast—when found in a heart that is intended to house the enthusiasm and impulsive generosity of youth. The young priest need have little concern lest he over-estimate the virtues of his elders. Nothing but good could result from such over-estimation. Nothing but harm can result from under-estimation of it.

The elderly priest who feels in his heart a tenderness toward younger colleagues that merges into yearning, an envy that expresses itself in prayer, a hopefulness that ripens into friendship, cannot but ennoble himself thereby. The young priest who looks with simple reverence toward his elder colleagues; whose heart is thrilled with pride in the record of their exacting work; who finds it easy to explain and still easier to overlook their shortcomings; who finds with sure instinct what is helpful and honorable in their lives, gives promise of wisdom that will honor his priesthood and insight that will protect his peace.

### III

#### THE PRIESTLY TEMPERAMENT

GRACE seems to surrender frequently to nature, although the intrinsic superiority of the former is beyond all question. Temperament and inadvertence offer obstacles to the action of divine grace and delay the spiritual transformation for which we look in the supernatural man. We are, of course, under the providence of God, masters of our fate. He gives His graces in abundance, but our choices condition their effect. And our choices are very often modified by temperament and inadvertence. Right attitudes of mind assist us in accepting grace. Mistaken attitudes of mind interfere with grace's action and hamper the process of the soul's growth. Faults of method in the spiritual life produce their own harvest of failure. Grace seems to take for its own the law that the Scholastics gave us for the operation of the mind. "Quidquid recipitur per modum recipientis recipitur."

Whatever be doctrine or fact in the relations of nature and grace, the priest ought to show forth in his life the supremacy of grace. He should be a transformed man. If religion is internal and transforming, as it must be, the priest should be made over, trans-

formed. The strength in temperament that leads him toward fault should be subdued by the certain restraints of grace. The weakness in temperament which exposes him to fault and sin should be so overcome by grace as to bring his average of spiritual strength up to priestly ideals. Unless these results are accomplished by the action of grace in the priest's life, he will yield more to nature than can be pardoned and receive less from grace than may be asked. A priest who is sensitive, suspicious, or intolerant by nature should conquer these qualities by the aid of divine grace. When the suspicious temperament is corrected by frankness and benevolence, when patience displaces resentment, when intolerance yields to charity and breadth of mind, we find proof of the action of grace in transforming temperament. When the morbid self-centered man is made bright and sympathetic, we find again proof of the presence and action of grace. The priest must show forth in his life the transforming power of the spirit of God. The laity show him reverence and obedience because they expect this of him.

To some extent judgment of the action of grace in the transformation of character will depend more on faith than on demonstration. We must believe that everything counts in the presence of God. We know through faith; that every kindly act and reverent prayer and habit of self-discipline finds its measured equivalent in the spiritual refinement of life. We may not know just where this strength is



stored in the unexplored recesses of the heart. We may not know the units of its measurement, nor the secret of its control. We may, in fact, not find conspicuous signs of sanctity in a transformed life. Yet we have the certainty of faith for the appreciation placed on every prayer and communion, every act of self-denial, every aspiration and thought found in the Christian life. We work and pray and accumulate merit which is known to God alone. Our familiar faults cling to us. Our shortcomings continue to annoy us. Yet beneath them there is a tidal movement showing the flow of deep, rich life toward God. Faith always, evidence very often gives us this assurance. Perhaps nothing stands forth more clearly in the traditions of spiritual literature than this. The sense of accomplishment is rarely given to those who live perfect lives in the presence of God. St. Paul found so much still to be done that he dwelt but rarely on what he had achieved. While we naturally crave the encouragement that comes from the thought of successful effort, that joy is frequently withheld from us in the spiritual life. It makes more real the appeal of the everlasting day which God assures to those who love Him.

When we take into account the temperament that leads one to the priesthood, the process of careful formation through which the soul is carried, the experience of the ministry and the thoughtful control of feeling and aim which is called for in priestly life, we see clearly that there must be a priestly temperament



which one may understand and describe. Temperament in a priest aids or hinders his personal sanctification and affects his ministry profoundly. Setting aside the question as a whole, we may take up certain traits found in the priestly temperament which merit thought and suggest self-examination.

### THE HABIT OF EDIFICATION

The habit of edification is fundamental in the priestly character. The priest must cultivate the talent of seeing and rejoicing in goodness wherever it is found. One may be indifferent to moral beauty or to a rare type of spiritual heroism just as one may be indifferent to the glory of a sunset or the grandeur of a mountain. The habit of edification, of discovering and enjoying goodness in the lives of others, can be cultivated as readily as the talent to appreciate beauty in nature or art, and to enjoy symmetry in line or proportion in mass or unity in composition. On the other hand one may remain untouched by moral and spiritual excellence just as one may be ignorant and unresponsive before a masterpiece of imagination and execution in the domain of art.

If God is in everything, the priest ought to be able to find Him and point Him out. Where supernatural goodness is, there is grace. If the spirit of God shines forth dimly in natural and fully in supernatural virtue, the priest should be expert in detecting that presence and forcible in proclaiming it. He should

be expert in producing goodness in his own life. His life should show forth that balance among the virtues, that proportion in judgment, pursuit and expression, which may be called the most attractive fruit of grace in human life. The priest should be skilled in discovering goodness in others. Whatever the reticences and disguises of virtue—for real virtue is timid—it should never escape the vigilant priestly eye. Everything wholesome, pure, and self-forgetting in the world should teach him, rouse him, and make him happy. He should feel a quick impulse to understand and enjoy it, as tact and circumstance permit, much as the discovery of a noble paragraph or of a picture of rare beauty sends one in search of others to share the joy of it. This is more than a figure of speech. Either it is literally true or nothing that we say about the exalted office of the priesthood is true. There is much wisdom in Dolly Winthrop's principle in *Silas Marner*: "If there's any good to be got, we've need of it i' this world—that we have."

A priest who can witness an act of moral heroism or deal with a refined character without feeling his heart touched and inspired is a spiritual defective. He lacks a primary talent of the supernatural life. A priest who can read with indifference a noble page that might open new spiritual vistas to his soul and might show forth in clearer light his own exalted mission and destiny, is dull and inert where the work of God calls upon him to be intense and sure. Every

noble thought or pure emotion or refined example brought to our knowledge by observation or reading, is a messenger of God. Our spiritual writers have not hesitated to call it a grace. If our minds are not open to such appeal, we are spiritual dwarfs. If we shut our minds against influence of this kind, we defeat the benevolence of God. If we are merely indifferent and unmoved, we waste the treasures of heaven.

This habit of edification must be cultivated. It depends partly on talent, largely on will and therefore on grace. It is conditioned by our ordinary mental processes. On its natural side at least it is a point of view, a method of singling out certain features of human conduct and admiring them. There are many battles to be fought in the process of developing this power. One cannot escape many struggles with temperament, many severe processes of self-denial in the course of it. This habit of edification constitutes a fundamental charm of the saints. In the atmosphere of a soul that has developed it, resentment, sarcasm, selfishness can find no place. The habit of seeing and loving goodness is the birth-right of every priest. God gives it for the asking. But it must be asked as God ordains. Once it is given, it fills the world with goodness and inspiration. It brings to the heart all happiness and peace.

There are many features of the habit of edification that should appeal to us. There is the supreme joy of it; the joy of discovering something that we prize

highly; the joy of being inspired by the spirit of God in our spiritual ways. This ought to be the dearest experience in the world to the heart of a priest. An expert in goodness should be delighted in the discovery of it anywhere. Then there is the strength of it, the bend of life toward the goodness that we admire. To meet and appreciate moral heroism or spiritual grandeur of any kind clears our spiritual understanding. It sharpens the instinct by which we recognize our own temptations and the subtle disguise of their approach. It stimulates sluggish impulses, awakens us from indifference to zeal. It gives us example that we may imitate, nobility that we may praise, inspiration that we may obey. Then there is the helpfulness of it, the help that we give to others by appreciating their goodness. These find virtue much more attractive when we recognize and encourage it. Few of us realize how much we may do in the moral upbuilding of others by respecting goodness in them and by declaring it with tact. It is the business of the priest to develop goodness and bring it forth in others. His own habit of edification develops this power in him wonderfully. James Lane Allen says in *A Cathedral Singer*: "It is the rarest experience of our lifetime that we meet a man or woman who literally drives us to the realization of what we really are and can really do when we do our best. What we all most need in our careers is the one who can liberate within us that life-long prisoner whose doom it is to remain a captive until another sets it free—



our best. For we can never set our best free by our own hands; that must always be done by another."

Finally, there is the democracy of it. The habit of edification distinguishes neither high nor low, learned nor ignorant, weak nor powerful. Who more than Dickens has shown this? He tells us that one of the great lessons that he sought to teach his nation was that the noblest virtues in the world are found among those in lowly station. Ruskin too caught the point. He says: "I trust there are few men so unhappy as never to have learned anything from their inferiors; and I fear there are few men so wise as never to have initiated anything but what was deserving of imitation."

A priest who lacks the habit of edification—that is, capacity to be helped by the good example of others and sensitiveness to spiritual beauty wherever found—is seriously handicapped in the process of his own sanctification, because he is deprived of one of the chief supports of spiritual ideals. Furthermore, he loses one evidence of the spiritual mastery which his priesthood calls upon him to exercise over the souls entrusted to his care.

#### THE HABIT OF INTERPRETATION

Some years ago a magazine published the life story of an immigrant from Central Europe who had a wonderful career in the United States. This remarkable sentence appeared in the story, "All things taught him."



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All things should teach a priest. All things wait upon interpretation. The priest should be docile toward events. They teach us only when they are interpreted. A priest may cultivate the habit of interpretation or he may destroy it. He may learn from everything or he may learn from nothing. He may be impressed only by what is striking and wonderful while the commonplace leaves him untouched. The priest's mind should be docile toward the universe and sensitive to interpretations which put souls into things and arouse the mind. Are there not sermons in stones, tongues in trees, books in running brooks, good in everything? A mind which does not interpret is a dead mind. One which can interpret and will not is a lazy mind. The mind that is intelligent and trained is enabled to see the hidden meaning in things and to find joy and wisdom and peace in this vision. A spiritually-minded layman once said in substance to a friend, "Life is my literature. God is so evident at every turn, the dispositions of His Providence are so manifest and the moral processes of individual and social life are so clearly under the direction of His hand that I feel it possible to put my hand out in the dark and touch Him whenever I wish."

We who believe in God, believe that His Providence directs the ways of the world. We believe that there are no details in the plans of God. Everything proclaims His power, announces His law, and vindicates His wisdom.

O Thou whose equal purpose runs  
In drops of rain or streams of suns,  
And with a soft compulsion rolls  
The green earth on her snowy poles;  
O Thou who keepest in Thy ken  
The time of flowers, the dooms of men,  
Stretch out a mighty wing above,  
Be tender to the land we love. (STAFFORD.)

We find the same thought nobly expressed by Ruskin, who tells us that, "The work of the great spirit of nature is as deep and unapproachable in the lowest as in the noblest objects; that the divine mind is as visible in its full energy of operation on every lowly bank and mouldering stone as in the lifting of the pillars of heaven and settling the foundations of the earth; and that to the rightly perceiving mind there is the same infinity, the same majesty, the same power, the same unity, and the same perfection manifest in the casting of the clay as in the scattering of the cloud, in the mouldering of the dust as in the kindling of the day-star."

God is in the course of human life no less than in nature. His overruling Providence exerts its sway over the imaginings of an innocent child no less than in the perplexities of a statesman. St. Paul has given us the supreme law of interpretation of the providence of God. "For them that love God, all things work together unto good." Now the priest is God's interpreter, a reverent, not arbitrary, interpreter, a docile, not self-sufficient representative of

the divine law. He is called upon, then, through prayer and study to seek to find the ministry of God's way in the world and to interpret that way to souls. He must interpret history no less than contemporary life. He must interpret, in the collective life of society no less than in the career of the individual, the typical human experiences that he observes. The courses of life, the clash of forces, the sway of passion, the triumph of evil, the defeat of virtue, the association of innocence and suffering as they pass before his eyes every day, wait to be interpreted in the light of God's Providence, in order that the children of God may find their peace and sure direction. Illness, temptation, trial, success, failure, distinction, even disgrace, innocence grieving and sin triumphant, leave traces of their coming and going in the very fibre of the soul. But only the gift of interpretation will enable the priest to find and to proclaim the purpose of God hidden within them. There is no other tradition more fixed in the history of Christianity than the conviction of the presence of an overruling Providence in each detail no less than in every mystery of life. Nothing is more evident than this, that only the spiritual eye can discern it and find wisdom in that discernment. What is more delightful than to meet a priest who possesses this gift of interpretation, who by instinct rather than culture, by intuition rather than intention traces with throbbing heart the wonderful course of divine Providence in his own life and in the lives of others entrusted to his

care. "Holy men," says St. Gregory, "in that they are one with our Lord, are not ignorant of His sense."

It is said that experience teaches. Experience cannot teach unless it is interpreted. Much of the morality of the world is built on the interpretation of accumulated human experience in relation to moral and spiritual principles. The practical wisdom of any man is the result largely of his interpretation of experience. Business forms, forms and methods in credit, the progress of the professions are simply established interpretations of experience. The virtues are completed through interpretation. No outlook on life is true except the spiritual outlook. The spiritual outlook rests on God and the human soul and all human souls, and on the overruling providence of God in the direction of human affairs. Therefore, the fully developed man is spiritually minded. The worthy priest is spiritually minded. Many of us all but lose our souls by not taking the soul's point of view in the world and by not realizing that God deals with us as having souls and that we must accept our souls with all of their implications if we are to know God's ways at all.

There are certain fallacies of which one may be guilty in attempting to interpret either the course of history or of nature or of human life in the terms of the providence of God. One may assume, for instance, that it is easy to point out the providence of God. This is not true. To do so is difficult because of our tendency to overlook the traits on



which our surest guidance is conditioned—unselfishness, humility, sympathetic faith, reverence, detachment, and wide observation. It is not easy to interpret the providence of God in the recent war<sup>1</sup> or in an earthquake or in a catastrophe that involves great suffering and leaves a trail of anguish and grief. We do know in a general way that the benevolent purposes of God maintain their sway as long as life endures. We do know that through the magic of the love of God all things may be made to serve us well. We may with due reserve and becoming reverence attempt to interpret the providence of God in its particular aspects. But the key to sure interpretation is found in our understanding of the providence of God as it governs our own life. The priest who fails to interpret his own life in the terms of the providence of God will have little success in his attempts to explain it in the lives of others. In a general way, we may point out the action of God in sending affliction of any kind. Pain has a wonderful ministry in the world. But when suffering is associated with innocence, and moral degradation brings no remorse, and evil lifts its head in triumphant scorn, the finding of the providence of God may not be as easy as it seems. We may speak of the bless-

<sup>1</sup>“The religious results of the war are the secret of God, and none of us is in the Divine confidence.”—Cardinal Mercier. A crude but touching effort to fathom the government of the world and the mystery of pain is found in Dolly Winthrop’s discussion in *Silas Marner*, Book II, Chapter XVI.



ings of poverty in the hope of encouraging the poor, but who shall give us insight into the kind of poverty that leads to shame and degradation and to the defilement of angelic innocence?

We must believe that every separate human life is under a special providence of God. Surely a human life means as much as a sparrow to the divine mind. The priest should be expert in finding that providence and in guiding the faithful according to its benevolent dispositions. God does not depend on platitudes in teaching us the laws of life. We may resort to platitudes in attempting to explain or interpret providence to others, but the gift of interpretation in our own lives or in the lives of others will not be given except when earned through prayer, reflection, and unselfish effort. Let us make no mistake. The providence of God is not easily discovered. But it may be discovered and declared as far as we have need of knowing it day by day.

There is another fallacy to which a priest is exposed in respect of the providence of God. It is that of interpreting Providence in a way to vindicate his own policies in governing a parish or dealing with the people. I have known it to occur. A priest who had a number of disagreements with members of his congregation interpreted every illness, accident, death, or misfortune which came to them, as acts of Providence punishing the parishioners for daring to resist him. Can there be a fairer proof of egotism and irreverence than this? When a priest foretells

that the unerring providence of God will punish visibly a parishioner who refuses to contribute to a parish fund—and this has been done—does not the irreverence amount to sin? One function of meditation in the priest's life is to sharpen the sense of interpretation of the providence of God and to guide in the discovery of the spiritual meaning of the experience of life. Our spiritual thinkers in all ages have endeavored with zeal and continued effort to discover the traces of God's action in the world and to teach us how to discover them for ourselves. One of the happiest compensations of meditation is found in the development of this spiritual attitude toward life in which the habit of interpretation becomes fundamental. It is, when well developed, the dearest source of spiritual assurance and holy wisdom.

One of the chief uses of great literature is to discover and portray the overruling providence of God in the world. The priest who is indifferent to literature loses this support of the spiritual life. When wisely read, literature develops spiritual imagination and sympathy and makes acute the moral sensibility which is the sentinel of all virtue. Literary critics tell us that literature explores human motive and passion through their inmost recesses. It discovers and charts the tidal movement of feeling, emotion, and aspiration that comes and goes in the human heart, and furnishes the key to the deeper interpretation of the events of human history.

All philosophers of history aim at the interpreta-

tion of life. We who believe in God and in the soul must develop the habit of interpretation if we would have a spiritual outlook at all. The priest is the herald of God. Should he not be skilled in finding traces of the presence of God and in declaring the law of His action? As herald of God the priest has the pulpit and the confessional where he mediates between God and man, interpreting man to God and God to man. The vision and power that come to a priestly heart blessed with this power of interpretation abundantly repay all study, all prayer and effort.

### THE HABIT OF SELF-CONTROL

The habit of edification gives soul to life. The habit of interpretation gives richness and depth to it. The habit of self-control gives moral safety and spiritual balance.

The normal man is conscious of the emotions of hatred, admiration, love, resentment, desire for mastery and distinction. In some mysterious way we accumulate an excess of emotion which is not expressed in normal occupations. It seeks expression in some secondary phase of our personality. Enthusiasms, mild aversions, fads, are like safety-valves which permit us to consume our surplus store of emotion and energy. The average man will hate something, love something, admire something, seek to dominate situations or persons and expect dis-

inction or recognition. If this is true of men generally, it is, of course, true of the priest. No priest may be indifferent to the law of God, to the rule of spiritual perfection or to the approved standards of time and country or to the proprieties of his office in selecting objects or persons for dislike, admiration, mastery, distinction, or service. The deeper self is revealed through the persons and objects that we dislike and through the motives of our attitude; through those which we admire and proclaim and through the motives of our attitude; in the kinds of distinction that we seek, in the type of influence that we love to exercise, and in the forms of mastery for which we strive.

One becomes careless easily in respect of these. Were we to include in our examination of conscience our aversions and admirations, our longings for mastery and our pride in it, we would be greatly assisted in the work of self-knowledge and sanctification. Only such aversions, admirations, strivings as can pass muster in the sight of God are permitted in the priestly heart. A spiritual assay undertaken to determine the purity of motive in our resentments, aspirations, and joys might cause us many an unpleasant surprise. We can sometimes cover our likes and dislikes in a way to hide their real meaning. But frank self-examination will often uncover a crude selfishness unworthy of our intelligence no less than of our priesthood.

Self-knowledge and self-control find their highest



mission in these aspects of the priestly life. We live largely through our admirations, dislikes, indignations, love of mastery, and desire for distinction. The priest who has these emotions under fair control, holding true to the law of God and the spirit of His service, cannot fail to be of exalted type. The source of real self-control is found in a proper understanding of the value of things in the scheme of life. There are greater interests and lesser interests in the world. There are higher, no less than lower joys. There are experiences that are worth while and there are those that are not worth while. There are those that have a relative value as well as those which have an absolute value. It is really not a great achievement in the life of the priest to be expert in indicating the good points of a horse or to be a champion in some form of game. A priest who can play a skilful game of tennis or turn in a good score at golf, or is an expert shot or perfect horseman, possesses a source of real joy and wholesome companionship. No one with an "ounce of common sense" can say the contrary. But if pursuits of this kind steal the priest away from serious purposes, from the spiritual ambitions of his calling, and fill his diminished cup of happiness all too easily, his higher self-control will be overturned and he will find his joy in "insignificant supremacies," which do him little honor and his priesthood, much less. The priest must exercise intelligent spiritual control over admirations, dislikes, indignations, love of mastery and of



relaxation, desire for distinction and lesser joys of life, if he would obey the plain law of God.

Self-control should extend always to the proportions observed in indulging feeling of whatsoever kind. A priest who becomes violently angry because an altar boy arrives late for Mass is left utterly helpless when he wishes to express stern indignation in the presence of real iniquity. He should reserve great anger for great occasions, moderate anger for ordinary occasions, and the "small change of gentle dissatisfaction" for the trifling episodes of life. Superlative emotion is like the superlative degree in adjectives. If we waste our strongest adjectives on ordinary situations, we shall be unable to express supreme emotion when it is called for. Those who are cautious in the use of adjectives, always have words proportioned to situations. Making mountains out of molehills is an occupation not found in the life of a self-controlled priest. There is art in feeling, as there is in representations of beauty. The essence of it lies in the sense of proportion. It is the function of self-control to impart proportion to feeling and its expression. Its law is admirably stated in a sentence found in the Breviary on the feast of St. Hedwig: "*Prudentia in agendis sic emicuit ut neque excessus esset in modo nec error in ordine.*"

A word might be said in particular about control of the emotion of fear, that subtle form of selfishness or self-consciousness that at times touches every spring of action in the heart. The psychologists

tell us that fear is a "constant detail of life." One may have abnormal fear of criticism or of making mistakes or of inviting opposition. One may have an abnormal fear of pain or of loss of health or of misunderstanding. One may fear loss of prominence or diminished recognition. At any rate, the presence of fear is to be looked for in every life and its action may be suspected in many of our faults. A priest who gives serious attention to the problem of self-control will not neglect to study his fears and to become skilful in detecting their action and disguises at any point in his life. Self-control is not merely negative. It includes compulsion as well as restraint. It involves doing as well as not doing. It forces us to speak and act on occasion as well as to be silent and inactive on occasion. Fear harms us when we err through timidity and excessive caution.

The development of self-control requires reflection, effort, and prayer. This is self-evident. We are helped greatly by the habit of edification and of interpretation in our task. Much may be learned from our experience in life. One who learns by one's own mistakes will be quick to discover how many of them are due to lack of self-control. The priest, however, is in a peculiar position in regard to this. There are certain features of his position in life which prevent him in a way from learning through experience as most men should.

The average man is greatly assisted in developing self-control by the experience of resistance. He lives

and works among equals who challenge his judgment without apology and dissent from his views without fear. When our wisdom may be questioned and when resistance may express itself without the slightest hesitation, we learn gradually to keep our expressions of view or feeling within the lines where we can protect them. The experience of resistance of this kind tempers emotion among sensible men. Now the priest does not ordinarily meet a kind of resistance that will train him. He has the habit of authority and the resources of leadership. The faithful look to him with reverence, and they are silent when they disagree with him. A priest who does not reflect and who is not conscious of the processes that surround him is robbed of the wholesome discipline of resistance and is made the victim of his immunities. When this occurs, his self-control suffers.

Uncertainty in one's position is of much assistance in developing self-control. Men whose positions and income depend on the suppression of feeling develop self-control to a remarkable degree. Who has not known men to keep rage under perfect control lest they endanger their positions? Wherever we find employer and employed, the latter develops self-control in both feeling and expression just in proportion as income and position might be endangered through lack of it. Now the priest has not the discipline of insecurity in this sense. His position in the priesthood and his standing among fellow-priests, and for that matter his tenure of office, are practically

secure to him. This security is to a great extent independent of his self-control. If from the standpoint now held in mind we may look upon the discipline of insecurity as a grace, we are compelled to admit that it is to a great extent denied to us in the priesthood. This is said, of course, under obvious reserve.

Another factor which develops self-control is the discipline of consequences. The average man is compelled to bear with the penalties of his mistakes. While no man may escape this discipline, the priest does escape it to some extent. Hence the problem of developing self-control is made a little more difficult for him. The consequences of the mismanagement of the finances of a parish will be visited on the congregation when the priest may escape them. The merchant knows that his customers can punish him if he gives them occasion for complaint. The public official knows that he too can be made to suffer for a single imprudent display of temper or fault against courtesy. Vivid realization of consequences is always a discipline. Yet the priest escapes it to a marked degree.

The high-minded priest will not suffer because of these exemptions. He will draw insight, strength, and motive from his ideals. The sacredness of his office will inspire him. Its exemptions will but make him still more faithful to the spirit of God and to the duties of his priesthood, still more diffident of himself. He will not lack self-control. He will show it



forth in a way that is infinitely charming and entirely to the credit of his priesthood. Borrowing a thought which is to the point, a priest's celestial intimacies should shine forth in his domestic manners and his actions should declare the lofty aims that direct his life.

It is not easy to see how a priest can satisfy the elementary demands of his office if he fails to cultivate the habits of edification, interpretation, and self-control. It would be difficult to indicate the shares of grace and of temperament in this work. Grace has no fairer field in the world than the heart of a priest. Nothing is more difficult than to live near to the ideal, to be held to it, to be measured by it, to be its exponent and example. Nothing is more distressing than to fall short of the ideal when consecrated to it. Temperament is either a help or an obstacle in the priestly life. It is our duty to understand that and to find in this understanding help in the work of our sanctification.



## IV

### CLERICAL SHYNESS

ONE hears it said rarely that priests as a class are shy. Those of them who show this trait are supposed to be shy by temperament, not on account of training or profession. Such priests would have been shy had they been attorneys, physicians, or salesmen. There are many observers who insist that shyness is not more conspicuous among priests than it is among men generally. It is said that a certain well-known department store was compelled to move its stock of men's furnishings from the third floor to a place on the first, near the entrance, since men were too shy to go to the third floor to make their purchases.

Shyness takes on many forms and it is known by other names. It seems that many of the psychological traits of the priesthood, the place that it makes for itself in the social world, its faults of omission and some of its peculiarities are consequences of shyness. And this shyness is the natural outcome of the Christian life, the seminary course, and the position of the Church in the world. I hesitate to describe shyness as a failing, since some might call it a virtue and ally it to self-respect. On the whole, however, it is a form

of timidity and self-consciousness by force of which one is disposed to avoid persons or things merely because of the trait and for no other reason. A shy priest is sensitive and disposed to shrink from contact with others. When the choices of a shy person are unconstrained, his preferences will lead him to avoid presence or action, to remain negative. And in all of this the motive is not impersonal and objective. The case is one wherein one yields in a shrinking way to the impulse to avoid occasion for contact with others. Sensitiveness, diffidence, modesty, reserve, are closely related to shyness. Since the dictionaries have been unable to differentiate them successfully, we cannot expect to do so. Perhaps best results will be obtained if the reader constructs his own definition and judges the value of the statement of facts and interpretation now offered, in the light of it. One may be socially bold, but shy in intellectual matters. One may be bold in private, and shy as an official. Dignity as well as humility, strength as well as weakness may be shy.

Many priests feel ill at ease socially when they mingle among different types of men and women at social gatherings. They lack the poise, self-confidence, and the easy manner which accompany ripened culture. Conversation is difficult and it shows evidence of unsuccessful effort to be interested in others about one. The prevailing sense in the mind of such a priest is one of aloofness, of total lack of genuine

interest in those whom he meets. Culture is not shy, although it is reserved; but culture in this case is overcome. A priest of this kind becomes self-conscious and more or less awkward and he seeks to escape his inner confusion by looking for someone whom he knows well. When a friend is found in the gathering, ease and self-assurance return, but the desire to escape remains. Experience of this kind leads many priests to avoid general social gatherings. They feel no impulse to overcome this reluctance or to acquire the social self-mastery which, under the guidance of the sense of propriety, gives self-confidence its redeeming charm.

Many priests are reluctant to take active part in public meetings devoted to general welfare. This trait develops in spite of the fact that fundamental changes in the moral sentiment of the world now ask representatives of religion to take rank among moral leaders who guide the newly awakened demand for the larger social justice. One notes with some concern that this type of social leadership has departed from the ranks of the clergy to a great extent, and it has been taken over by scholars and public leaders independent of religion, though in sympathy with it. Now priests are leaders by office and habit. They are trained to public speaking and they think easily on their feet, as the phrase is. Yet this opening for clerical leadership fails to arouse us. When we are compelled to take active part in social movements, we are often willing to be considered ornamental and

to become no source of power and insight. We are led at times to diminish what we say to the level of platitudes and to waive all pretence of making serious contribution to a discussion. I have known many occasions when the laity felt some resentment at priests who had opportunities to address public gatherings with force and effect but contented themselves with idle words and unconcern. Such behavior, taken in contrast with the culture and power of other speakers, was a source of real disappointment to those who believe in the power of the priesthood and the superior qualities of the priest. There may be many causes to explain such action. May not shyness be one of them?

Priests are scholars. They are men of long and careful training. Their intellectual equipment is superior. They are trained in consecutive thinking, in philosophy, history, theology, and literature. Their opportunities have been more varied and promising than those which the average scholar has had. Yet priests are not conspicuous in seeking companionship of scholars. No man is more welcome at a representative gathering of scholars than a scholarly priest. There are many thousands of priests in the United States, yet the number of them to be found at gatherings of scholars is negligible. We have a certain liking for what may be called corroborative erudition, that is learning which defends our positions. Perhaps we are more interested practically in arguments than in truth. We



have little enthusiasm for pioneering in the thought world, for research. There are many among us who write willingly on devotional or purely Catholic topics for Catholic circles wherein readers are kind and laudatory critics abound. We need so much that is not written by ourselves and we have so little need of much that is written by ourselves that one wonders at both the fact and the explanation. There are undoubtedly many causes that lead to this condition. May not intellectual shyness be one of them? If a priest overrates the scholar and underrates himself, is it not probable that the former will be shy when they meet?

These observations will suggest others to those who are sufficiently interested to follow the inquiry as far as it may lead. We can secure a background for it by a review of the elements which enter into the mental formation of the priest. These elements relate to the Christian life as a whole and to the Christian attitude toward time and eternity. Marked as their action is in the life of the sincere Christian, in the case of the priest their effect is intensified. When he is of a temperament which renders him sensitive to the operation of the truths and graces of the Christian life, his general attitude toward the world and its complexities will show a fundamental tendency to shyness. His good sense, appreciation of his mission and its powers may enable him to conquer it. But many will fail and remain shy. Did St. Paul read life well or merely state doctrine



when he called us "pilgrims and strangers on earth"?

The priest is a citizen of two worlds which are in mutual antagonism. Browning expressed the thought in "An Epistle":

Heaven opened to a soul while yet on earth  
Earth forced upon a soul's use while seeing Heaven.

In proportion as a priest clarifies his vision of the supernatural, and the touch of eternity shows in his attitudes and sentiments, assuredly he develops the consciousness of being a stranger to this world, of being surrounded by every kind of danger to the soul. I do not see how any priest can live a normal or helpful life and develop the sympathetic kind of leadership which is expected of him, if he takes seriously to heart the distracting and gratuitous accounts of the world and its snares that are given to us so often in our more extreme spiritual literature. That priest is a marked man who can develop a wholesome judgment of the world and its spiritual dangers and at the same time retain the ease and poise in dealing with the world which are essential to successful leadership. When the full force of the logic of the supernatural is experienced, it develops the impulse that makes the hermit. There was some insight on the part of Professor James when he applied, though with needless acerbity, the phrase "church fugient" to those who seek to unify life and avoid its inner

discords by dropping external relations as far as possible and aiming at supreme surrender to the things of the soul. Austin expresses the same thought in his poem on Monastery Bells when he describes the impulse to run away from the confusion and anguish of the world and seek peace in the monastery.

Sorrowing, one stays with sorrow, still resigned  
To work unhired amid life's hireling mart.  
To cherish in the crowd, monastic mind,  
And in a world profane, a cloistered heart.

The full realization of the conflict between the claims of time and eternity engenders a sense of strangeness in the soul and develops an impulse to shrink from social contacts as the safer solution of the supreme problem. Lives respond to this pressure in different ways.

One would expect that the effect of this tendency in spiritual teaching would be, first to depreciate the importance of merely social and worldly things, then to engender a spiritual fear of their effect and finally, to develop an impulse to shrink from them except in as far as social contacts are usual or imperative. Gifted souls can solve the problem happily. Those of lesser powers will solve it with varying degrees of error and awkwardness. It would not be surprising if shyness were one solution resorted to by priests who fall short of the power and insight needed. I have in mind no carefully sifted observations which show how far this is actually the case in clerical circles. No doubt many readers will be in position

to recall observations which illustrate how far it is. Belloc says in *The Path to Rome*: "If one is really doing a Catholic work and expressing one's attitude to the world, charity, pity and a great sense of fear should possess one or at least appear." If this is true, as I take it to be, and timidity in presence of the world is a Christian trait, shyness may be looked for among spiritualized natures generally and particularly in the character of many priests. Shyness is the child of fear and self-consciousness. Fear is of many kinds, and shyness takes on many forms.

The sense of strangeness described as a probable outcome of unimpeded spiritual formation is perhaps temperamental. Weir Mitchell remarks somewhere that we must always count on the effect of human nature in the individual on moral or spiritual forces. As natures vary, these are modified in their action. We should take into account certain elements in our spiritual teaching, the effect of which might easily be in certain natures, a tendency to shyness. In the Christian life self-effacement, humility, consciousness of sin and distrust of the world's standards are conspicuous. Every one of us will have preached or can recall sermons which taught us to be timid before the world, to be on guard against its allurements, to be patient under misrepresentation, and even silent under calumny. Few of us have been taught from the pulpit to defend our rights, to assert our powers, and to go forth scorning danger and demanding justice. It is difficult to measure the

extent to which this general range of teaching might develop in the Christian life a diffidence and caution which lead to shyness. Taken in conjunction with other factors which operate in the same direction, we should antecedently expect it to appear as a marked trait in spiritually minded priests.

If we go back into the personal history of the priest, we find much in seminary training that predisposes to shyness. The moment that a young man declares his intention of studying for the priesthood he is set apart. All of his social relations are changed. He is pledged to high ideals of personal sanctity and severe standards of renunciation. He begins to cultivate a special attitude toward normal and ordinary things. The spiritual and social teaching and processes of character formation in the seminary tend to make the seminarian self-conscious, socially timid, constantly watchful in all social relations. Worldly recreation and associations are cut off even during vacation, since the seminary exercises certain control over its students at that time. In some seminaries, formerly in all of them, the seminarian was prevented from taking active interest in current events. Knowledge of these was represented as useless to him for the time being. The claims of the priesthood demand all of his time and energy and the interests of priestly formation demand as a sacrifice all attention to earthly things and contact with them. During seminary years social contacts are reduced to a minimum and life is to that extent



simplified. The seminarian has little, if any, general social contact, particularly little with women other than his relatives and close friends of his family. This simplification of social life robs the seminarian of adequate opportunity to acquire social poise. It prepares him badly for the infinite social complexities of life which he must face once he enters the practical ministry. Seminarians are amenable to their training in varying degrees. Some take to it kindly. Some resist it moderately. Some are completely dominated by it. Many of them show a social timidity which is nothing other than shyness.

Every life tends to follow its own forms of strength. Human motives, like mechanical energy, follow the line of least resistance or greatest attraction. If the young priest feels quite at home among priests and among Catholics, but experiences awkwardness, self-consciousness, and even constraint in general social intercourse, he will tend to shrink his social relations to his co-religionists and thereby develop shyness toward others. Social intercourse depends largely on small talk, as trade depends on small change. Without a reasonable supply of both one gets on badly in this world. The young priest who unconsciously attempts to keep his social relations simple by confining them to those whom he knows well, will not develop the supply of small talk that makes intercourse with all social circles easy.

It may be worth while to make a distinction between the young priest and the elderly one. One



friend with whom the subject of this article was discussed remarked, "All young priests are shy, but they get over it quickly." A seminarian expressed the same view in the same words. The young priest is very formal. Doctrine has more influence with him than experience. He has only the book terms, not the human terms in which doctrines may be understood. His timidity before the dangers of the world is intensified because of the keen and admirable hold that he has on priestly ideals. He recoils against what he calls worldliness. Again, this worldliness is one of definition, not of observation. His timidity in the presence of general social contacts rests rather on the memory of lessons studied than upon conviction of the truth of them. Young priests who are intelligent will work out an intelligent attitude. Some of those who fail to do so will unconsciously resort to shyness as their final solution of the problem.

Seminary training and association, the tendency of Christian teaching, recoil from the social complexities of life in the search for inner unity, are factors that operate in the life of the priest in a way to dispose him to shyness. Certain types will overcome the tendency. Others will yield to it. But the priest is more than an individual. He is a churchman. In proportion as his love of the Church is profound and his sympathy with its spirit is prompt he will be disposed, as the saying is, "*sentire cum ecclesia.*" Its loyalties will be his law. Its interests

will invite his affection. Its service will be his supreme privilege. A priest of this kind will reflect in temperament and habit the relations of the Church to the world. Now the Church takes a position in society based on a sense of separateness from it. The memory of its treatment by the world is filled with the experience of misunderstanding, hatred, persecution, misrepresentation, calumny, and effort at annihilation. I have in mind not primarily the world's instinctive dislike of spiritual truth which involves self-discipline and obedience to a supreme moral law held in reverence and obeyed with love. Nor have I in mind the complaint made often with uninformed sincerity that the Church exalts the interests of eternity as against those of time, and that she insists too much on individual sanctity and too little on present social welfare. That is an attitude that might be taken honestly enough and without hatred. What is referred to now is the Church as a great factor in history and in present-day life.

The Church as a social institution with uninterrupted history mistrusts hostile scholarship, because that type has so often misrepresented and attacked her. It has reason to fear the power of sovereign states. They have persecuted and exiled her. It has reason to fear many of the Christian sects which have found in her power their humiliation, and in her brave preservation of essential spiritual traditions that lead her straight back to Jesus Christ, their own embarrassment. The Church is slow to trust where

she has been betrayed. Now this historical, no less than actual, experience engenders in the clergy a sense of separateness, of remoteness, if the term is permitted, which has a very far reaching effect on general clerical attitudes toward the world. Hence it would not be surprising if the priest, in whose temperament and intelligence the spirit of the Church finds its lodgment unhindered, discovered within himself a tendency toward shyness such as we have it in mind.

Timidity will as a rule work differently in different types of temperament. Our theology separates us from the rest of the Christian world. Our concept of moral law and of the sacramental system distinguishes us. Our understanding of the process of sin and forgiveness is distinctive. It would be amazing if this sense of separateness in the world failed to engender in a large section of the clergy an attitude of shyness. Again, the priesthood is confronted by many new situations in a changing world. The priest is asked to do this and that, to appear here and there. He lacks precedent. Authorities may have given no direction or may have encouraged reserve. A by-product of this experience is shyness.

A side consideration presents itself here. The priest is a leader. He occupies an exalted position as head of the parish. His ascendancy is due primarily to his office, secondarily to his achievements and personal merit. His equipment is the result of his education. He has received a scholarly training,

whatever the degree of enduring scholarship that marks him. While the pastor in a small town may still be the best educated man in the community this is not the case in the larger cities. Few city congregations will be found where there are not physicians, attorneys, educators, social workers, public officials, who are in their several lines the intellectual superiors of the priest. Thus he is exposed in his work as a leader to the experience of spiritual and social ascendancy combined with intellectual inferiority. I can easily imagine types of priests who are unwilling to stand before the public, let us say at public gatherings, where they may be compared to others who are intellectually superior. Quite naturally a protective shyness might develop under the influence of which the priest would either be inclined to avoid public meetings of this kind, or, if in attendance, he might waive all pretence at serious effort and confine himself to generalities rather than pretend to make a serious address. I have known a few instances which could be explained in that way. Not enough of them occur to mind to permit a statement to be made with much assurance.

It would be scarcely fair to discuss shyness in clerical circles without taking account of the factors that bear on it. The parochial clergy is a body of busy men. The details of the ministry are exacting in the extreme. Time is so broken that there is little opportunity for the kind of leisure that invites



systematic study. To a great extent assistant priests in city parishes are compelled to subject the conduct of their lives to the needs of the parish and to the judgment of the pastor. The routine of life is largely fixed. Desire not to appear singular is strong. The tendency to conform to tradition and practice is marked. The young priest finds a pattern of life waiting for him. He conforms to it without thinking, without self-analysis, without calculating the force of that pattern in the priesthood as a whole. As a result, shyness appears as an aspect of the unconscious adaptation of the young priest to a situation which he cannot control. Exceptional priests rise above the situation. Many priests will fail to do so.

At any rate, there are certain large facts concerning the priesthood which demand explanation. The clergy's lack of interest in the world outside the Church is one. Their lack of contact with the general scholarship of the country is another. Their failure to take commanding position in the social movements that are inspired by a passion for justice, their preference to shrink their social contacts to their own circle, are others. It does seem that shyness is one of the factors needed to explain the situation.

I asked two priests of great distinction whether or not shyness is a clerical trait. One of them answered, "Certainly, all priests are shy. That is as clear as daylight." The other answered, "There



is no such thing as clerical shyness. Shyness is independent of the priesthood. It is purely temperamental." However, the opinion prevailing in circles where inquiry was made indicates that shyness is a clerical trait which often interferes with the effectiveness of the priest beyond the duties of his ministry.

## V

### MINOR HAZARDS IN CLERICAL LIFE

THOSE who preach to priests and those who write books and essays for the spiritual direction of them agree in the view that certain undesirable traits appear frequently in clerical life. We are informed in much detail on the origin, development, and consequences of them. Warnings are expressed and earnest appeals are made for a degree of watchfulness and prayer which will insure the priest against the tyranny of these recurrent failings. The agreement found among spiritual teachers as to the nature and harm of these qualities is striking. The authority which they enjoy gives added significance to what they say. Hence the criticisms of spiritual life referred to represent in a certain practical sense the mind of the Church in its judgment of the ideals and the sanctity of the priesthood and of the dangers to priestly character and efficiency that are found in the ministry.

The instincts of the Church are not mistaken. Its teachers are guilty of no exaggeration when they exhaust the resources of language and explore the farthest reach of spiritual emotion in attempts to represent worthily to us the grandeur of the priestly

office. The Church's judgment of the priesthood has infinitely greater authority than the personal view of any priest. Now the clerical faults described by our teachers are judged in the light of a very exalted appreciation of the priesthood. In proportion as we lower our estimate of it we appear to find fewer faults among priests. Hence priests who feel well satisfied with themselves and their fellows may be the victims of low standards of judgment rather than the happy observers of a high degree of merit.

The priest may be judged as a man. As such he is exposed to all of the subtleties and indirections of sin. From this point of view he is a child of God resembling other children of God in temptation, in the need of grace and prayer, and in the obligations of simple and unquestioning loyalty to the law of God. This is, however, not an adequate point of view. Ordination sets the priest apart. A tedious course of training aimed to give to him a particular mental and spiritual outlook. It did not nor can it permit him to look upon himself as he would look upon others to whom the high calling of the ministry was not vouchsafed. The priest who judges himself merely as a man held to avoid sin and to obey the general law of God may feel well satisfied with himself and be unimpressed by our literature on clerical failings. The point of view, however, from which we must judge the priest is that of a man who shares the powers of God and is called upon inexorably to vindicate his vocation by personal holiness.

The priest who is not holy is unpriestly. God demands of him spiritual intelligence and joyous familiarity with spiritual realities. He should possess a tone of renunciation and spiritual aspiration that are as sentinels to his heart wherein dwells the spirit of God. Criticism of the priest which is based upon this point of view will not relate to the avoidance of obvious sin. It will deal with the positive elements in priestliness and the failure of the priest to equal his graces and his spiritual destiny. Universal consent in the traditions of the Church holds that there are certain exercises in the spiritual life that absolutely condition the growth of the priest in holiness. The failure of the priest to follow the essential routine of spiritual life in respect of meditation, prayer, penance, renunciation, and complete unselfishness, will occasion much criticism. It will take on very often a vehemence which cannot be understood or justified except from the standpoint of the spiritual grandeur of the priesthood.

Again, the priest may be judged as a minister of souls; as pastor, guardian of sacramental graces, pattern of spiritual ideals, builder in the Kingdom of God. Criticism of him in this character will bear on his efficiency as the ambassador of Christ. He is called upon by the Divine Law to develop qualities which strengthen him in his work among souls. He is expected to show zeal, patience, a spirit of sacrifice, discernment of souls, and to reenforce his teaching by his example. He is called upon to possess all of

the knowledge required for the performance of his duties. He is asked to reenforce his efforts by earnest prayer for those whose souls are in his keeping. He is required to surrender his prejudices, ambitions, and pleasures to the demands of his office as the representative of Christ and to find in the completeness of his loyalty to duty, all compensations and peace.

Criticism of the priest from this standpoint will relate to qualities which interfere with his duties toward souls. The natural qualities of leader and teacher are taken into account. Since the normal destiny of the priest is to serve souls directly or indirectly, the literature which concerns him points generally toward his pastoral office. A priest may be exceedingly holy and at the same time a very ineffective pastor. Another may be an effective pastor in as far as it is given to us to know, and fall short of the standards of personal holiness set before us.

The spiritual literature which deals with clerical failings judges the priest from the three standpoints indicated. The practical agreement among our teachers in their fault-finding leads us to the conclusion that general forces are at work in producing certain of our faults. These forces are associated with the clerical life and they interfere directly with the excellence of priestly character and the effectiveness of pastoral service. We are led in this manner to see that there are occupational hazards in the clerical life practically inseparable from its nature



and circumstances. The priest is called upon, therefore, to acquaint himself with these forces and to adopt systematic measures which will prevent them from interfering with either his victory over obvious sin, or the positive attainment of personal holiness, or the effective service of souls.

An analogy is at hand. One of the most helpful achievements of modern social reform is the recognition of occupational hazards in industry and the development of adequate protection against them. Painstaking investigations show us that certain diseases occur with frequency in stated occupations. It is possible to estimate with reasonable accuracy the probability of accidents of certain kinds and of all kinds in every industry. The prospects of recurrence of certain diseases in given occupations is well understood. This knowledge has enabled enlightened employers, public opinion, scholars, and legislators to adopt effective safeguards against accidents and occupational diseases. Changes in methods in the factory, the introduction of safety devices, systematic precaution of various kinds have already made possible an improvement in conditions in industry that is an outstanding glory of our time. But back of all of these methods of foresight and care we find constant appeal to the working men themselves to show vigilance and to cooperate faithfully with the measures intended to protect them. It is a matter of common experience that without such faithful cooperation on the part of the laboring men pre-

cautions are practically useless. With it they are effective to the highest degree.

Making due allowances the nature of which is obvious, we may say that there are occupational hazards in the clerical life against which we must be well advised and must practise prudent foresight. Our spiritual literature furnishes abundant information as to the nature of these spiritual hazards and as to the methods of combat against them. But no literature will avail unless the priest himself is deeply concerned; unless he cooperate with intelligence and good will in forestalling the harmful qualities with which our spiritual literature so largely busies itself. It may be worth while to call attention to certain of these minor hazards in the clerical life. Those to be mentioned are selected simply because they occur to mind at the moment and not because of any impression as to their relative importance.

The first hazard to be mentioned relates to the combination in the priest, of power, security, privilege, and deference, called by a well known writer, "those mighty and eternal seducers of our race." The priest occupies an exceptional position as spiritual leader in a community. This position gives him great social and spiritual power. That power is exercised with a feeling of practically complete security, since ordinarily no provision is made for legitimate challenge or opposition which is warranted and unfearing. The priest is held in such reverence that

the wish to disagree with him is checked and impulse to oppose him is inhibited. "Nolite tangere unctos meos." The privileges and exemptions accorded to the priest are associated with the elements mentioned as constituting this minor hazard.

Power is always a source of danger to those who possess it. Cardinal Newman says somewhere that it tends to destroy the gentler virtues. Nothing makes a leader more wise in judgment or more prudent in action than the prospect of legitimate criticism to which he must listen. When power is exercised and no provisions are made for checks and balances, there is danger of the development of the habit of domination and a spirit of intolerance. Sensitiveness to criticism accompanied by obstinate determination to have one's way will appear now and then as the direct outcome of this condition. If the position of one who exercises power is insecure, this insecurity will do much to chasten his spirit and foster tolerance. But security added to power increases the hazard to temperament and character. When we add to this an attitude of deference in the people and the enjoyment of privilege and immunity by the priest, we have a combination that is full of possibilities of danger.

Illustration can be found scarcely in any one or two priests. But illustration in the priesthood as a whole is abundant enough. Power is expansive. It can so color conscience and confuse sanctions as to destroy at times all interior restraint. Then there is no safety except in external and effective opposition.

The discipline and law of the Church in respect of the priesthood contain rules and prohibitions showing that the priesthood has not always been free from the unhappy consequences of this hazard in clerical life. The literature of spiritual direction produced by our teachers rests on the assumption that this hazard is of sufficient consequence to merit much attention. How shall the priest meet the demands of his high office if he fail to take precautions against the dangers to temperament and outlook involved in this clerical hazard.

Another hazard is found in the fact that the priest deals with intangible things. He cannot be checked up. This may lead to the habit of disregarding results and of being satisfied with efforts alone, regardless of their outcome. The priest can be checked up as builder, financier, organizer. But such are not the primary aims of the priesthood. In its essential spiritual bearings there is no practical method of determining the spiritual value of a priest's work.

No one can determine how well or how badly a priest hears confessions. No other duty brings him nearer to Christ. The sanctification of souls is conditioned on his wisdom and his absolution. There is no practical way of knowing how well qualified a confessor is or of determining how well informed he is in dealing with sin, and guiding penitents back to the sheltered ways of grace. Even a confessor himself has difficulty in discovering his own mistakes in the confessional if he makes them. All of our spiritual



critics are agreed that the priest must study continually, that he must inform himself fully in preparing for the confessional. Yet the conditions under which confessions are heard put serious obstacles in the way of the confessor. Confessions are heard in a hurry. There is no time for thought. Decisions must be made quickly and direction must be given instantly. Spiritual direction has all but disappeared from the sacrament as it is administered. As a result the priest is exposed to the danger of becoming an indifferent confessor. He cannot be checked up unless his conscience and his zeal protect him.

The results of clerical prayer are intangible. The mementos and prayers that we promise cannot be checked up. No table of results, no balance sheet, no curve of the statistician can indicate the results of intercessory prayer which the priest is called upon to offer to God in the interest of the faithful. The results of prayer are hidden in God. Is it not possible that this leads to a certain carelessness and even indifference to the intercessory power of the priestly office? The need of striking a daily balance in a bank or a ticket office does more to make men exact and watchful than all of the preaching in the world. If there were any way of checking up the worthiness and constancy of clerical prayers, might not their quality and quantity be greatly improved? It may be that this question indicates a debased view of our loyalty. The universal tendency of man toward carelessness when there is no method of



checking up the results of his efforts offers grounds for fearing that the priest, like any other, may suffer from it.

The results of preaching are to some extent intangible. Reputation is not an aim in preaching. Hence a reputation is not proof that a preacher is doing the work of God in the way of God. Crowds are no test of the real value of preaching, since dozens of motives, not one of them related to a high spiritual purpose, may account for the throngs that listen to a man of reputation. Praise is no proof of the value of preaching, because the uncritical manner in which people offer praise robs it of all value. Spiritual experiences are silent and hidden. The real fruits of preaching are known only to God. The preaching that arouses a soul to a sense of sin or awakens stern spiritual ambition and brings God forever nearer to the wayward human heart must be inspired by consecration, guided by reverence, and sanctified by prayer. It must be the outcome of painstaking effort. The standards used by thoughtless, fulsome, and well-intentioned flatterers in showering indiscriminate praise upon preachers are so often false and pernicious that any preacher is in danger of being misled by it. Could the work of preaching be classified in the light of its real spiritual value in the Kingdom of God, there might be an amazing rearrangement of reputations in clerical circles. Were it possible to check up our preaching by its actual spiritual value in the sight of God, the Gospel might be preached with

nobler power and more enduring zeal than is now the case.

Preaching is in another sense one of the hazards of clerical life. Saint Paul must have been conscious of this in some sense when he feared lest preaching to others he himself become a castaway. The priest preaches to the faithful, but no one preaches to the priest except at the time of his annual retreat. It is true that the spiritual literature intended for him would preach to him with abundant power if he wished it to do so. But this is conditioned on his taking the literature seriously and seeking spiritual wisdom in it. The clerical mind takes on a bent which disposes the priest to look upon himself as expositor and teacher rather than as example and learner. Even when the duty of preaching is taken seriously, the habit of looking for sermon material in life and literature is apt to hinder the priest from taking the simple eager attitude of learner. To a great extent sermons should be lived before they are preached. Surely this is true of sermons that aim at spiritual direction. But if a priest separates his preaching from his living and feels no inclination to enrich his own soul before endeavoring to guide the souls of others, his preaching can become a snare to his feet. Bremond in his subtle study of Newman judges the entire interior life and spirituality of the great Cardinal in the light of his sermons. He believes that Newman's sermons are his spiritual autobiography. The priest who lives his own sermons before he

preaches them will be in no danger of becoming a castaway.

It is well known that the average priest dislikes the task of preaching to other priests. Those who share this feeling seem to believe that priests are not docile, not easily edified, not eager to be helped or aroused to sustained efforts after personal holiness. The priest is preached to in the annual retreat. On this occasion he has an opportunity to discover how far his own preaching reveals the depths of his own interior life and how far he has been saved from a perverted spiritual point of view. A clerical wit has suggested that every priest ought to rent one pew to his own soul in his own church. The plan might be worth while. As a master of ceremonies may miss entirely the spiritual element of them in his concern for their completeness and grace, the priest may so lose himself in concern for form and effect of his preaching as to miss entirely the relation of his sermons to his own spiritual life. As the word of God wells up from the heart of the priest and flows from his lips to strengthen and purify the children of God entrusted to him, shall not his own soul be enriched and shall he not become holy through the holiness which he preaches?

Another hazard in the clerical life is found in the tendency to substitute reason for faith in judgment and in practice, if not in doctrine. Faith, in the incomparable definition of Saint Paul, is the substance of things hoped for, the argument of things

that appear not. Our first duty is to receive the supernatural, not to test it. Our next duty is to proclaim rather than to demonstrate it. There is at times a conflict between theology and piety of which no priest should be unconscious. Theological argument has its place, but the writing of theology is largely a rational process. It aims at systematic exposition, argument, definition, explanation, in answer to some kind of actual or supposed challenge. Now argument and demonstration have little to do with the intimate pieties of daily life. Piety results from receiving and obeying faithfully the revelation of God concerning Himself, His Christ, our destiny and our duty. We receive the rules of holiness as well as the truth of revelation through authority. Faith is a gift precious in the sight of God. The will to believe is fundamental. Our piety should rest on our faith as its sure foundation. In addition, it should be discriminating and wholesome, not merely emotional. Reasoning and rational outlooks have a place in the spiritual world, but it is a humble and secondary place. Faith operates when by the grace of God we turn toward eternal things and accept them and answer their touch in the supreme surrender of love. When the point of view of faith is lost or in any way hurt, not alone in questions of doctrine but also in outlook and spirit, grave harm is done.

The priest's judgment of sin and its processes should be based on faith, not on reason. His judg-



ment of Church authority and his dealings with it should be guided by the spirit of faith and not by the subtleties and evasions of a purely rational point of view. The priest's judgment of penance, of self-discipline, of the traditions of piety, above all of saints and saintliness, should rest on faith, not on reason. The sense of spiritual needs, of spiritual aspirations, of spiritual dangers must be derived from the vision of faith with proper direction. How shall any priest lead his flock in the sure ways of spiritual peace, if he himself become a kind of minor rationalist and be led to depend on common sense and shallow views derived from reason and indifference, not from prayer and searching after knowledge of the spirit of God? This is a clerical hazard from which many priests will hardly be altogether spared.

The constant repetition of formulae involves another hazard in the clerical life. Mechanical activities are best conducted with least attention. Spiritual and intellectual activities are best conducted with the maximum of attention. An experienced man who drives an automobile in a mechanical way is most reliable, while a beginner who gives complete attention to his work is awkward and unsafe. On the other hand one who performs intellectual or spiritual activities in a mechanical way robs them of their meaning and degrades them. The work of the priest is spiritual and intelligent, not mechanical. The spiritual efficiency of the priest depends on the



intelligence and consecration with which he performs his duties. Our spiritual life is organized into definite forms which are carefully defined in the ritual, and these forms have the most solemn sanction of the Church. They are constantly repeated in the ordinary course of spiritual life. Repetition tends to become routine. Routine leads to indifferent and mechanical ways abhorrent to the purpose and grace of spiritual life. Mechanical reading of the daily Mass, mechanical repetition of the form of absolution, mechanical recitation of the breviary, mechanical administration of the sacraments, mechanical performance of other Church ceremonies, done often without even verbal integrity or done even with it, offer saddening commentary on the degree to which a priest may have become the victim of this clerical hazard. Unless the priest remain on guard against the seductions of routine, against mere formalism, he will defy every accessory purpose of ceremony and sacrament and rob his people of distinct occasions of grace. Artists find infinite charm in the "polished velocity" of rapidly flowing water, but there is no charm in the "polished velocity" with which words pour forth from priestly lips too rapidly to catch the soul or be touched by the grace of which words and forms are the intended vehicles.

One might be disposed to say that the use of Latin which hearers and observers do not understand has something to do with this tendency. But the fault remains only too often when we use English

in public services. It is amazing to note the extent to which we excuse ourselves from the ordinary laws of expression when we stand at the mountain of the altar of God and conduct the forms of worship by which we honor Him and seek His help in the weary ways of life. There are some who fall short of even pronouncing words distinctly in divine service. There are some who attain to the utmost rapidity with which words can be uttered. There are others who read a ceremony with entire indifference to meaning and are guided by neither understanding nor feeling in their action. There are those who do endeavor to conduct every divine service with the dignity and intelligence that faith imposes and the Church commands and the people expect. The effect is always happy and inspiring.

The whole development of the ceremonial of the Church is due to its recognition of the power of imagination and symbolism in life. No other organization in the world has read the human heart as she has read it or has expressed the understanding of it with equally dramatic power. Form is necessary to protect the integrity of spiritual processes and express the fulness of spiritual emotion as the Church interprets it. The grasp of the Church on the spiritual world, and her power to express her understanding, are wonderful, and yet many of us drift into habits of routine and mechanical execution which baffle every helpful purpose that the Church has in mind. A priest who on one occasion attended the

funeral of a non-Catholic Army officer in the home of the latter remarked that the service read by the minister was the most impressive that he had ever witnessed and that he had not always seen nor himself always conducted Catholic funeral services with an equal tone of dignity and reverence. Routine and formalism are deadly enemies of spiritual life, clerical hazards to which we too often fall inadvertent victims.

The tendency of doctrinal certainty to occasion intellectual indifference outside of the field of doctrine indicates another clerical hazard. We accept Revelation on the authority of the Church. We accept the guidance of theologians in applying revealed principles of human conduct to the perplexities of life. We find dogmatic and moral theology organized into logical systems. Assuming that we possess the one thing necessary, many of us become indifferent to the wider intellectual and cultural interests of life. This indifference goes so far as to kill all interest in the history of the Church and of doctrine. The outstanding minds in our history that left their impress forever on our belief awaken little interest, and the outstanding churchmen and saints that brought the world within the sweep of their sympathies and placed all of the interests of life under the touch of their power, stir scarcely any interest in us. Definition simplifies the work of men. Security allays worry. Why take on unnecessary solicitude concerning culture, literature, the social

action of the Church, when we have dogma, the sacraments, and adequate forms of worship?

Now a priest can be a very effective pastor and a very holy man without knowing much theology and without any solicitude for the cultural interests of life. But the Church is helpless in the face of challenges hurled against her by the world unless her priests are equipped and prepared to meet them. Indifference to the wider interests of the Church, indifference to her missionary duty in the world, indifference to current standards by which power is rated and a cause is judged, hurt the Church grievously. The power of the Church is in the priesthood. Private initiative, rarely Church authority, originated the great historical steps by which the Church met the succeeding challenges of the centuries. Only a priesthood that has the spirit of zeal, intelligence, and sacrifice, and that neglects no opportunity and shrinks from no effort to equip itself fully, enables the Church to speak to the world as her mission demands.

Another clerical hazard relates to the danger on the part of the priest of acquiring a theological conscience. This type of conscience furnishes material for varieties of clerical humor. It results largely from an intention to avoid sin rather than grow in holiness. Hence exact definitions of what is or is not sin tend to guide one's footsteps, and the vision of higher life is blurred. There is a true concept of moral theology which represents it as the systematic



presentation of revealed principles that underlie human behavior in the effort of man to attain to the vision of God. It is in reality, as the lamented Doctor Bouquillon always insisted, practical dogma as distinct from speculative dogma. There is an unworthy and mistaken concept of moral theology which represents it as the science of minimizing the moral obligations of the Christian life. Casuistry when seen in this light becomes its predominant characteristic. Whatever the legitimate uses of casuistry in the development of Christian life, it is not a rule of perfection. It is a method, not a doctrine; a makeshift, not an ideal. Presumptions in favor of human liberty, when one is interpreting Divine Law, are justified; but they may lead to a faulty attitude toward the higher demands of the Christian life. Life is an experience of the spirit, not a series of definitions. The priest whose conscience drifts into the habit of minimizing the obligations of priestly life will be led far from the paths of perfection. Habitual attention to the dividing line between what is permitted and what is not permitted kills interest in what is noble and desirable. Insistence on the dividing line between venial and mortal sin may lead to indifference toward the latter no less than the former. No priest can rise to the high level of his powers and his mission unless he guide his life by positive and noble ideals of priestly conduct. The exactitudes of casuistry fall far short of expressing the law of the life of God. Noble principles expressed



in generous definitions and interpreted with a loyal spirit are characteristic of the true priestly conscience.

The priest should be on his guard against processes in clerical life of the kinds alluded to. But no amount of solicitude for personal holiness or effective service of souls will avail unless the priest guard the standards on which his judgment of the world is based. Interior peace is of itself no proof of wisdom and sanctity. There is a peace of death as well as a peace of life, a peace of surrender no less than a peace of victory. There is a peace that comes to those whose standards are so low that any effort seems to be exalted virtue and any escape from grievous sin seems to be a heroic achievement. The literature on clerical life developed throughout the centuries places high standards before the priest. The fault-findings and warnings which recur in this literature are due to intense appreciation of the holiness of the ministry and the elementary obligation of the priest to be holy before preaching holiness to others. The priest must accept the Church's judgment of the priesthood. He must believe that the collective sense of representative leaders throughout the centuries has given us a correct estimate of the priesthood, its dignity, and its law. No personal estimate formulated by a priest himself who bases it on a dim spiritual light joined to a dislike of effort, love of ease, and a certain air of superiority, may be

safely followed as the law of perfection. The hazards of clerical life cause little fear to the priest whose standards of personal holiness and of service of souls are noble and exacting. They give much cause for fear to the priest whose personal standards are low. Under the Providence of God we find our safety in interpreting and obeying the spirit of Christ and of His Law. In the doing of His work there can be no satisfying standard of personal holiness or of service of souls except such as may be placed before Him without hesitation. The priest who has no fear of God's judgment of his standards will never be harmed by the hazards of clerical life.

## VI

### CLERICAL DOCILITY

**T**HE firm upbuilding of docility as a trait in Christian character is one of the most difficult tasks that confronts us. Much of the difficulty lies in the fact that the elements of docility appear to be in conflict with the practical necessities of life. If one is permitted to be inert, to lack self-assertion and to avoid the responsibilities of leadership, one may be docile without particular effort. If one must be forceful, must invite and inspire confidence, assume the authority of leadership and carry policies through to successful issue, how is one to cultivate a virtue which may require one to change views at a moment's notice, to discipline partisanship until it loses its narrowness, and therefore, its power, and scatter timidities through self-confidence until the latter is lost? Where are they who are as willing to learn from enemy as from friend, as glad to be taught by inferiors as by superiors, as wise in learning from their own mistakes as from their master's lessons, as intelligent in recognizing their limitations as they are active in declaring their power? Docility seems to require all of this. The extreme to which it may sometimes go is illustrated in the remark of a good-natured grocer who stopped suddenly in the midst

of a heated debate with a friend and said, "May be you are right. I have been wrong so often in my life that I am always afraid to back up my own opinions."

It is not difficult to explain the theoretical requirements of docility as a trait in Christian character. It is extremely difficult to describe exactly the obligations in speech, action, and policy imposed upon us in the details of ordinary living. The majority of decisions that guide our daily life are really provisional. In the light of to-day's wisdom and duty, this or that course is imposed upon us. But to-morrow may bring clearer insight, wider information, and new conditions in the light of which yesterday's decision may appear to be a mistake. No one exhausts truth and wisdom at any one time. The old principle of the philosophers, "Verum vero vere numquam repugnat," helps us only in speculative truth and only when we have a hold on an unchallenged truth. But in practical affairs the *verum* of to-day may be a *falsum* to-morrow, because life changes constantly and its adjustments are beyond our foresight. Saint Thomas warns us definitely as to this in 1a. 16, 8, when he shows that subjective truth is changeable and we are required to alter our descriptive views of life as rapidly as changes occur.

If we were purely intellectual and infallible, the problem would be simplified. But the whole truth concerning practical things is more or less inaccessible and we lack an unfailling standard by which to judge its fragments at any time. Feelings and memories



hold us only too often after wisdom has deserted us. The cohesion of parties, the fervor of propaganda and the impressive certainties of leadership result not from logic and conclusions but from feeling, conviction, and perhaps self-interest. Furthermore, our first positions rest on a kind of faith rather than on demonstration. Attitudes of this kind depend not so much on evidence as on authority, and the instinct of loyalty and trust replaces the uncertainty of demonstration and conclusion. Our attitude toward democracy is one of social faith rather than demonstration. We feel profoundly that democracy must be right and the heaping of criticism, knowledge of appalling failures, and keen arguments from brilliant minds assail that faith in vain. It would hardly be wise to peril the stability of government on the outcome of debate. Faith in institutions is a first condition to their stability. A sufficient faith will vindicate an institution when lack of it would lead to destruction.

The determination of truth in everyday life depends largely on standards. If the test of Catholic charity, for example, lies alone in its supernatural motive, our charities are always successful when the motive is right. If, however, we must judge our charities by results as well as by motives, investigation and unswerving honesty must be brought to bear before the full defence is established in the face of challenge. Insistence on motive alone in a world that judges institutions by results would be at best inadequate

defence. Hence we are required to study our charities in their outcome. If there is such a thing as Social Apologetics, its purpose must be to show the results of Catholic faith and action to the world. In this case the study must be made with a docile mind.

Theoretically no virtue requires of us anything that takes on the nature of mistake. Only an incorrect view of a virtue could suggest the contrary. But life is dreadfully complex and the virtues are very much battered as we practise them. Now the tone of behavior and attitude and the views that we work into life while attempting to cherish a docile spirit are apt to affect us in the ways hinted at. It is on this account that the achievement of docility without weakness or evasion of the responsibilities of life is so trying. The need of docility is imperative. Truth is so difficult to gain and hold, justice is so impersonal and exacting, and the mind is so easily led toward error and injustice that life would be unbearable if we were not to recognize and respect the high obligations of both truth and justice. It is the business of docility to foster a love of both which is so impersonal and holy that the ideal man shrinks from neither effort nor sacrifice in seeking truth and serving justice.

A refined individuality is one of the most attractive charms of life. When one's views and attitudes are intensely personal and are maintained with a force touched by the gentle spirit of culture, we meet individuality in its most attractive form. But if one

must be prepared to surrender any view when it seems mistaken and to change any attitude that may be suspected of resting on error, how may the stability of parties be maintained. Can it be that an inevitable alloy makes virtue resistant and enduring even as a baser metal makes gold more firm? Are we disposed to pause in our quest for truth, to shape our attitudes and views at that point and then resist further knowledge lest it force us to modify a position? Can it be that the Psalmist had us in mind when he said of the unjust man, "Noluit intelligere ut bene ageret?"

A social worker representing a Child Welfare organization once appeared before a children's council and asked it for assistance in furthering a certain bill. She said, "We wish much information from you: not all kinds but such only as will sustain the position that we take in our bill." Are not all men disposed to the habit of selective observation which leads them to seek truth only in as far as it corroborates views or prejudices. In as far as this is true we take an interested not disinterested attitude toward truth. If it is the mission of docility to establish a disinterested attitude toward truth, who can be docile in a world full of controversy, misrepresentation, misunderstanding, and partisanship?

Limited as we are in intelligence, we are compelled to live and act and think with incomplete information. The whole truth is more or less unlike its fragments. Even the power that we possess is modified greatly

by temperament, association, and every subtlety of selfishness. Docility reminds us of this constantly and asks us to hold ourselves in readiness for the larger vision which might at any time come to shatter the certainties that result from reasoning. The processes of mind and feeling that sharpen our intelligence in its search for information and corroborative arguments make it increasingly difficult for us to understand anything which is in conflict with what we know and advocate. A good party man in our political life will in all honesty display a dulness in understanding the position of another party, quite out of keeping with the keenness displayed in advocating his cherished principles. Would it be possible at all to build up a political party if unswerving intellectual honesty, docility, and impersonal love of truth were outstanding characteristics of American citizens?

The newly ordained priest begins his clerical life with an impressive supply of definiteness. His mind is stored with text-book definitions, traditional formulae, and memorized decisions of moral problems. Even when he studied the varieties of theological controversy he gained little if any personal experience of confusion. He took certainties out of debate, made them his own and closed his mind by taking an attitude. The mind of the young priest is given to *a priori* views and to detached generalizations which have yet to make contact with the facts and confusion of life as he will meet it. The



habit of seeking authority and of accepting authoritative decisions within the field of doctrine, morals, and general Church policies makes the young priest docile toward the Church. This is as it should be. At the same time he may take an indocile attitude toward life under the influence of which he will underrate the value of experience, the quality of scattered wisdom to be found on all sides, and the demands that changing social conditions make on his intelligence. The young priest is apt to carry his certainties far beyond the point to which those in authority are willing to go in practical questions.

Knowledge of principles is extremely satisfying to a mind that is remote from the tyrannies of life and has not yet developed respect for facts and ability to see and judge them. A priest was once heard to remark in a most benevolent and sympathetic tone that industrial controversies are quite unnecessary since the solution for all of them is found in our Catholic principles. He had practically no knowledge of the details of any industrial controversy and he expressed no inclination to investigate conditions nor to find how that solution could be worked out. In proportion as trained men gain insight into the intimate facts of industrial controversy they discover the futility of merely studying principles and doing nothing beyond. The social principles taught us are precious because they are in themselves true, but only a docile attitude toward the infinite complexities of life will enable us to interpret them in ways



that will appeal to men who face the struggles and understand them. The seminary course gives us the impression that life is simple and things are fixed. The first lessons that life teaches us show how complex life is and how unstable. The praiseworthy efforts of seminaries to introduce practical instruction on social problems accomplish much in minimizing this difficulty and in establishing in the mind of the young seminarian full respect for facts and a docile attitude toward them.

The priest is trained for leadership and the teaching of the laws of the spiritual life. Leadership involves firmness of mind and definite attitudes. The teacher is supposed to have convictions and impart them. Docility involves openness of mind and a certain hesitation in taking attitudes. Now ordinarily leaders and teachers tend to be intolerant of opposition and to utter their messages with a tone of finality. It is said in American university circles that an eminent professor who insists constantly on freedom of thought and openness of mind is most intolerant of dissent on the part of his students. While the exercise of authority is supposed always to be intelligent, and it is assumed that one who exercises authority is intelligent, nevertheless the exercise of authority is more a matter of will than of intelligence. The transition from authority with intelligence to authority without intelligence is infinitely easy. When one's will is law, docility is endangered unless one take care. "*Stet pro ratione voluntas.*" It is a

wise custom in the law that induces judges to give reasons for their decisions.

Authority is expansive. It tends always to go beyond its warrant, as the history of democracy abundantly shows. It must have self-confidence, firmness, and definiteness. Without these it ceases altogether to be authority. Hence one who is called upon to exercise authority, as the priest is, ought to safeguard wisdom by cherishing a docile spirit. In this way one learns from life, from superiors, and inferiors, from friends and critics, from one's mistakes and those of one's fellows, and from the drift of life.

The priest is held in great reverence. Reverence implies superiority. Priestly dignity, like any other, is more or less sensitive and self-conscious. It is really a duty of those who occupy high station to vindicate the reverence in which they are held and to avoid causing discomfiture to those who hold them in high honor. While humility and docility are demanded in those to whom reverence is shown, the maintenance of these virtues is exacting in the extreme, not only on account of the subtleties of self-deception but also because of the needs of the case. One must be humble, yet one must maintain the dignity of an exalted office that is held. One must be docile, yet one must really claim and assert power, wisdom, and superiority. As one of our classical writers remarks, noble natures suspect themselves, doubt the truth of their own impressions, and yield readily to others, because they are vividly conscious

of their own limitations and of unexplored truth and wisdom beyond their horizons.

Intellectual education should develop in us reverence for truth, consciousness of our limited powers in seeking it and of our uncertainty in finding it. This is true in every feature of life. The well educated man should be as careful in judging his enemy or condemning his friend as he is in publishing a historical treatise. Truth is truth and justice is justice on every plane of action. Intellectual training enables us to observe, to compare, to judge, to sift evidence, to see facts and their relations, to draw correct inferences, to retain control of information, to assemble details into larger unities by interpretation, to push to the discovery of new truths and to the elimination of error. Moral training includes among its exacting tasks that of organizing into character a docile attitude toward life. Intellectual training enables one to learn. Moral training makes one willing to learn. "He that refuseth to learn shall fall into evils." When capacity to learn is associated with willingness to learn, and when courage, humility, and common sense protect that willingness, we meet one of the finest flowers of human culture.

Willingness to learn involves willingness to unlearn. Readiness to take any attitude dictated by truth involves willingness to surrender any attitude that is based on error. When the interests of truth and wisdom demand that we be open-minded, and the

practical necessities of life put extensive restrictions upon open-mindedness, we face a difficulty that is not readily mastered. Firmness of mind for which we look in leaders suggests partisanship and strength. Openness of mind for which we look in truth-lovers suggests uncertainty and weakness. An entirely open-minded man could scarcely be entrusted with the interests of a debate or the direction of a controversy, because definiteness, force, and certainty are called for. Bulwer Lytton describes Lord Trevelyan in *The Caxtons* as a man of noble purpose and great learning. Yet he was weak because he lacked imagination and conviction. The hero in *If Winter Comes* is described as incapable of decision, morbidly disposed to assume that he was always wrong because an unusual refinement of honesty led him to constant self-questioning. A widely read popular volume describes an experiment in journalism in which the truth was studied absolutely from day to day without regard to yesterday or to-morrow. Consistency was cast aside. The experiment illustrates the fallacy that may accompany truth-seeking and the limitations that hamper us in the judgment of truth.

There are no isolated convictions in life. Conclusions may be cold-blooded, logical, and certain, but clever reasoning can overturn them. When a conclusion advances to the stage of conviction, it becomes bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. Feelings proceed to build it into life, to anchor it solidly, to put it beyond the reach of argument and



defend it blindly, because it is ours, not because it is true. As bodily organs occasion much trouble when abnormal adhesions develop or when normal supports fail, mistaken attitudes cause equal difficulty when emotional adhesions anchor them so strongly that the condition can be corrected only by radical spiritual surgery. And when conclusions fail to become convictions, they remain weak and leave us uncertain. Feeling, interest, selfishness, vanity, partisanship which are quite free from intelligent direction play havoc with us constantly. They put on the livery of conviction, take the name of truth, and invite blind defence at whatsoever cost. The docile character is on guard constantly against these processes lest they lead to error. At the same time, excessive docility weakens character.

Unwillingness to learn or to change one's mind operates to our detriment in many ways. It exposes us to the danger of being confirmed in error and it threatens the instinctive love of truth. When one gains a reputation for "knowing it all," others are discouraged from offering advice or giving information that might correct one. The spirit of self-sufficiency develops and then one is indisposed to learn from one's mistakes or from the experience of others. Such learning interferes with vanity and imagined prestige.

If we take it for granted that real culture should familiarize us with the true and the good under every aspect and acquaint us with our indefinite capacity

for self-deception and error, docility should be an outstanding trait in cultured men and women. This is not the case. Prejudice, narrow-mindedness, deliberate ignorance, self-sufficiency and intolerance are to be found as frequently among educated men and women as they are among the ignorant, and always with infinitely less excuse. "Insular inhospitality to imported ideas" is by no means confined to the uneducated. The history of religious bigotry found among educated men and women discovers to us an amazing lack of desire to know the whole truth and equal lack of willingness to seek it, to proclaim and respect it. The modern newspaper, religious or secular, is an organ of culture. Without doubt all newspapers make mistakes at times either because they are misinformed or their evidences are incomplete or their interpretations of evidence are faulty. Now if a newspaper should be docile toward truth and justice—and who will deny that it should be?—we could well ask that whenever a mistake is made corrections and apologies be forthcoming. A newspaper that confessed and apologized for all of its mistakes and changed its mind as rapidly as its knowledge of truth made it necessary would soon be bankrupt. Its readers would not support it. Many years ago a clever writer wrote an interesting defence of the doctrine of journalistic infallibility in order to excuse newspapers for their silence in respect of their mistakes.

The priest who is a cultured man will be docile.

He will recognize tendencies in his education and in his work as teacher and leader of souls which endanger the development of this virtue. He will be disposed to take advice, to change his mind, to admit error, correct injustice and follow the impersonal ways of prudence. He will never assume that he is always right and that those who disagree with him are always wrong. He will have an inquiring mind that leads him to inform himself accurately on movements which concern the work of the Church, the spiritual welfare of his flock, and his own rôle in his social community. He will not attempt to force facts to conform with his detached generalizations and *a priori* views. He will build up no smoke screen of assumptions and prejudices which hides life from him and protects his undisturbed certainties from their placid slumber. He will not, to take a single illustration, condemn organized charity and social workers until after a painstaking and conscientious study has convinced him (if such be the case) that they deserve condemnation. He will not refuse to study the faults in Catholic charity nor will he claim that it can gain nothing from thorough and sympathetic understanding of newer methods and more exacting ideals of service.

The cultured priest will be tolerant of his superiors and willing to learn from them. He will be quick to recognize superiority in any line, even among those who are technically inferiors, and he will rejoice in finding truth anywhere and giving it a cordial wel-

come. It is method rather than result, attitude rather than outcome, that is important. He will understand the tendencies in his life against which he must be on guard, the quiet reserves that should temper his certainties and the discriminating sympathy that will make him thoughtful in dealing with others. He will find something inspiring in the noble tribute paid to Henry Adams, a man of extraordinary intellectual attainments, when the editor of his letters said of him, "He never liked to show that he saw farther or was any wiser than the person he was with and he usually took the attitude of being instructed."

The virtues are never isolated. They are related to one another intimately, and they must be judged always in the light of that relation. It is useless to study docility in itself. It must be examined in relation to other virtues which support it and to faults which hinder its development. Humility, charity, sympathy, instinctive reverence for truth and a reasonable diffidence help greatly to make one docile. Vanity, arrogance, selfishness, and obstinacy create a mental atmosphere in which docility perishes. St. Thomas tells us repeatedly that moral qualities are practical forms of intelligence and consequently that there are traits of character which reduce our capacity and our willingness to learn. A resentful man is less able and less willing to understand the divine harmonies of forgiveness than one who is free from resentment. A reverent man has an insight into life that



is denied to irreverence. An arrogant man loses gradually both power and will to understand the truths that are roots of humility. The priest who wishes to be docile must look not alone to docility but to the whole trend of his life, to the temperamental qualities that are the raw material from which he is to build a Christian and priestly character. When docility is gained, not it alone but many other precious traits of character are mastered. When docility is lost, not it alone but many other traits essential in the priestly life perish.

St. Thomas tells us frequently in the *Summa* that one should be "bene conciliativus." He shows that we have very great need of being taught by others. A disposition by force of which we are disposed to take advice is called by him "Eubulia." It would be difficult to improve on his definition of docility, which he represents as a part of the cardinal virtue of prudence; a virtue by which "quispiam promptus et facilis est ad suscipiendam disciplinam et ad acquirendam ab aliis cognitionem." It would be well for us to memorize and to make into a rule of daily life the words by which the Angelic Doctor indicates the nine conditions required "ad debitum modum scientis." "Scire humiliter sine inflatione, sobrie sine praesumptione, certitudinaliter sine haesitatione, veraciter sine errore, simpliciter sine deceptione, salubriter cum charitate et dilectione, utiliter cum proximorum edificatione, liberaliter cum gratuita communicatione, efficaciter cum bona operatione."

## VII

### CLERICAL MYTHS

**M**YTHOLOGY interests few priests. Myths, if discussed at all, are associated with our memories of the classics. We adorn our style now and then with allusions to them, but we give scarcely a thought to the general human meaning of the myth-making faculty and the relation of myths to mental and social as well as spiritual life. Mythology now ranks among the fundamental sciences which attempt to explain the history of primitive races, the beginnings of institutions and of systematic interpretations of the world. Myths are, however, not as remote from us as they seem. All civilization is infested by them. The recent war revealed a capacity for making and believing myths unsurpassed in any previous time in the history of the world. Education neither hampers the mythopoeic faculty nor reduces our credulity on which myths flourish. The graces of the Christian life do not banish them, if we may believe our spiritual writers, who discuss them under other names. Culture and power do not destroy them, since the mighty fall victims to them as readily as the illiterate. Nor is the clerical life without myths. It is generously supplied with them. Sometimes the priest becomes a myth to himself. Again he envelops others in

clouds of myths. Many bishops are mythical to their priests. Whether or not the mythopoeic faculty is ever quite mastered in clerical circles is a question which does not fall within the lines of this study.

Words are wayward. They have habits, temperament, and atmosphere. When heard, they mean what they stir within us rather than what they convey to us. The history of a word is as interesting as a biography. The association of words with prejudices, points of view, interests, and memories so colors their meanings that frequently their literal sense is the last for which we look. Hence when we speak of myths, superstition, magic, legend, and fable, we are apt to understand them in the light of what we know and feel about the facts to which they refer. We may for the purposes of this study take the word myth to indicate in a general way a belief produced by fancy rather than by investigation. We accept the belief because we are superstitious, that is credulous, uncritical. A myth is a result, while superstition is a method of reaching it. One who is superstitious accepts myths and makes them the basis of behavior. If this use of the terms appears to be without warrant, perhaps the explanations to follow will justify it. Myths, in their literal sense, are not confined to religious beliefs of primitive peoples. Modern psychology discusses them and the mythopoeic faculty quite as thoroughly as mythology and ethnology. The mythopoeic faculty is universal

and automatic. It requires no training to reach high efficiency. In fact, we have to be trained to check it, and some of the most baffling problems in character formation relate to this process.

Scholars find in the historical systems of myths essential likenesses, amazing inconsistencies and characteristics. Back of all of them, they find an identical function in race development, similar mental processes and stages of evolution. Similarly psychologists and students of morals find in the personal mythologies of ourselves likenesses and differences which bear striking analogy with the systems of myths of ancient days. Hence we may with profit analyze the problem from the standpoint of origin and meaning before making application of any interpretation to the clerical life.

To be rational is to be curious. Reasoning is a process of inquiry. Normal minds crave explanation, and the craving is wayward. Persons, events, forces, and relations which attract our attention must be explained, must be interpreted. The foundations of all philosophy whatsoever are found in attempts to answer the questions what, how, why. These are the great stream beds through which the curiosity of all ages and of all peoples has flowed. We are ill at ease; we have a sense of being incomplete, of being in suspense if we are compelled to deal with persons, things, or forces that we do not in some way understand. When it is said that one is "dying of cuir-



osity," a great truth is expressed lightly. It was a man of dull wit who first insinuated that curiosity is a feminine trait, since all who reason and inquire are curious. The mind that is not curious is moribund. The detective is curious about traces of crime. The gossip is curious about a neighbor's business or character. The historian is curious about the past. They who consult fortune-tellers are curious about the future. The botanist is curious about the growth and distribution of plants. The physicist is curious about the action of natural forces. The chemist is curious about the relations and associations of the elements. Half of the lying in the world is defence against curiosity; hence it is the purpose of conventional privacy to protect us against prying.

It is the purpose of education to arouse and direct curiosity about things, events, and processes that are worth while. The child that cannot be aroused to curiosity of the right kind cannot be educated at all. Children who are wayward are largely the victims of wayward curiosity. Savages and children are curious but uncritical. In them imagination is vivid and all views are superficial. They are impressed by resemblances, coincidences, assumptions, sequences, and similarities. They believe readily those whom they trust. Now when primitive peoples demand explanation of natural forces, of events, achievements, and persons which engage attention, explanations must be forthcoming. If these do not come from without, they will be invented within

mind and consciousness. Invention, not investigation, will occur. Minds which set out to find explanations will be the victims of every kind of plausibility and resemblance. They will have no real test of truth, but will experience a feeling of satisfaction in having found an explanation for something which engaged the attention. The plausible misleads them. In fact the educated mind has its most severe struggles in fighting against the plausible in every field of observation and social life.

Savages have our powers of curiosity, but they can not concentrate and sustain attention. They lack ability for consecutive thought. Imagination envelops their real world and they lack power to distinguish between objective and subjective. Hence their only concern is not that they may know the truth, but that their curiosity may be set at rest. They desire to have some kind of explanation of the origin of things, causes of change, manifestations of power. They aim to account for their own origin and history and in the account, to give expression in concrete form to tribal pride. They ascribe personality to everything that changes or moves. The forces of which they have experience must be made personal in order that thinking and speaking of them may be made easy. They witness changes of season, night, dawn, and day, manifestations of emotional and natural forces and the like. These must be talked about, must be explained. Lacking power of abstraction, of looking out on the world about them

from the standpoint of exact knowledge, they interpret the world and its forces in personal terms and imagined qualities and relations. They project personal life into everything that shows change or motion. It is interesting to note that St. Thomas defines life as motion from within. Mythologists tell us that the history of thought is the story of the process of narrowing and intensifying the concept of personality. To us, only human beings in the visible world are personal. To the savage, "all nature is a congeries of personalities."

The myths of primitive peoples are therefore the sum of their philosophy, science, religion, and experience; the sum of their imagined explanations and interpretations of self and of the world and of its forces. Since these peoples are highly imaginative, poor in capacity to generalize, extremely limited in vocabulary, they are misled, but satisfied, by resemblances, plausibilities, coincidences, and every kind of assumption uncritically accepted. Neither speaker nor hearer has any protection against the limitless powers of imagination. Myth may be defined, then, as a "fictional or conjectural narrative explaining nature, natural forces, events, or persons, with practically no basis in fact." These narratives are superstitious in the sense that they are uncritically accepted. The believer is credulous, superstitious. The successor of the myth in the history of the human mind is Science. Science is a series of descriptions or explanations of nature, natural forces, events, or

persons that are critically established and that satisfy the most rigid tests of truth to which the human mind has attained. While through mistaken views science frequently becomes a myth for the civilized man, a myth is always science for the savage.

The transition from myth to science is dramatic. The discovery of fixed relations between cause and effect in nature; the knowledge of the universality of law and the uniformity of its processes; the development of systematic research and the establishment of standards of thought, measurement, and comparison built a throne for Science, and unseated the myth from its ancient place in the directing of human thought. Science teaches us to suspect resemblances, coincidences, and similarities. It warns us against what is plausible and all that is merely imagined. It reminds us of our infinite capacity for error. It shows us the way to wonderful and unexplored regions of reality that invite the collective intellect of the race and challenge its most searching powers. Imagination has its honored place in all scientific research, but Science, as both orderly knowledge and orderly method, holds it in check and makes sure that its service to thinking and truth is properly controlled.

Formerly, capacity to know seemed to be limited only by capacity to imagine and credulous willingness to believe. Science, however, teaches us to search objective truth with painstaking care. It tells us that certain things are incredible or possible or prob-



able or certain. In every line of research after truth, that is in every endeavor to explain reality, we are warned against our tendency to err, to imagine rather than see, and to be misguided by feeling or fancy. Every alleged result that Science offers is tested critically, not alone in itself, but in relation to all other established truth. Only when an explanation withstands these tests successfully is it accepted and placed in the deposit of truth under guardianship of Science.

A commonplace illustration of the temper of the critical mind in seeking truth may be found in the suit at law. All theories and classifications of evidence, all technique of procedure and cross-questioning are directed toward the establishment of an elementary fact concerning which some conflict has arisen. This tedious process has been made necessary because of our infinite capacity to imagine, and the complexity of the process of saying and describing anything with accuracy. In an analogous way, we seek explanations of facts and processes in nature and among men. Error is tenfold more easy than truth. Moods, prejudices, limitations affect one's willingness or capacity to see things as they are in fact. Passions affect research. Even truth-seeking may be utilized as a weapon to advance an interest or vindicate a school or leader.

Truth-seekers who pioneered built up a very rigid set of rules for truth-seeking so devised as to protect the mind against its own tendencies to bias or error.

This system of rules is known under the name of Logic, which stands out for all time the keeper of the temple of natural truth. Logic warns us against myths and against the mythopoeic faculty, against false conclusions, credulity, inadequate tests, faults of language, and the tricks of consciousness of every kind. Logic is reason acting reasonably, redeemed from its tendency to err.

The struggle between reason and imagination is perpetual. It is easier to imagine than to search; simpler to guess than to prove; more pleasing to see what we wish than what is, and to yield to a prejudice rather than curb it. Hence the myth instinct remains strong in us. This is revealed in the joy that we feel in a striking metaphor or simile which is really a survival in language, from the myth stage of development. In the use of such figures of speech, we make a concession to the imagination and admit that a picture may be stronger than a scientific statement. In fact, poetry, prose, painting, sculpture, architecture give the imagination the freest play, personify emotions and forces as primitive peoples do, and preserve for us a moral and esthetic vision to which reason itself cannot attain. Half of the charm of all of these is in their mythological character, in the free play that they give to imagination and to the emotions without regard to the cold-blooded restrictions of reason. To call a man an Apollo is much more human, and if not trite, more expressive than to say that the mass of his body is so distributed about

its axis that proportions are well preserved, lines are symmetrical, and balance is maintained. The latter is the way of Science; the former is the way of mythology and imagination. Similarly, it is more convenient to say that a man is a Hercules than to say that the energy exercised through his muscular system equals a given number of foot-pounds. Half of the joy of life disappeared when Science invaded our dining-rooms and insisted on describing food in the terms of calories. No average man can like this term. When a "good meal" becomes merely a "balanced ration," Science changes the whole relation of food to life. Macaulay remarks that education deadens the imagination and that great work in poetry is rarely done by highly educated men. Milton and Dante are exceptions.

Myths have been studied mainly as systems of facts and processes in race growth. Race curiosity, race imagination, race credulity explain them. Mythology, psychology, philology, and kindred sciences have made remarkable research into the field. But there is work for each of us in our attempts to understand our personal mythology. Each of us is human and each of us has the mythopoeic faculty. Each of us is in a very small degree scientific and in a very large way imaginative, subjective. Much of the time when we believe we are seeking the truth, we are simply experiencing emotion. Even when we believe that we follow convictions, we are the victims

of preferences that do not reason. Myths are not confined to savages and children. There are perhaps no scientists who are free from them. Science as a whole is only too frequently the prey of prevailing myths. We are infested by myths. Our self-estimates are mythical. Our public men are hidden in clouds of myths. Partisanship and bigotry create more myths to-day than all the primitive peoples of all times ever dreamed of. What Catholic could recognize the mythical Church against which ignorant bigotry raves. Party politics is nine-tenths mythological. International politics is even more so. The beginnings of the world and of primitive peoples are not more obscured by myths than is the beginning of the great war from which we have just issued. Throughout this series of illustrations, which might be extended indefinitely, we find one enduring fact. A myth is a "fictional and conjectural narrative explaining nature, natural forces, events, and persons with practically no basis in fact." Myths are possible because the mythopoeic faculty is inborn; because invention is easy and research is difficult; because resemblances, coincidences, dislikes, assumptions, and generalizations require no effort and give a measure of satisfaction to mind and will. We see what we wish to see. The wish is prolific father to thought.

Logic, the defender of truth and the keeper of its temple, is an exacting master whom we do not like. The ancient who described his gods as guilty of gross



conduct was not on a lower intellectual plane than the scholar of to-day who will believe without evidence any calumny uttered against a public leader whom he dislikes. The willingness of every type of man to believe without question anything against one whom he may dislike is amazing. Suspicion with its horrible magic works changes in our attitude toward friends that are quite as striking as the transformations through which savages believed their imagined beings to pass. Which of us will hold himself a whit better or more rational than the savage, since the comparison is always to our disadvantage? Temperament, prejudice, partisanship, resentment, self-interest make us at times haters of truth as no savages ever were. The enslavement of many of our attitudes to these mythopoeic factors within us is complete. One does not notice that the educated are more exempt than the illiterate; that the Christian is more exempt than the pagan; that the priest is more exempt than the layman. If it is the business of education and culture to overcome the mythopoeic faculty, both of them must confess to failure. If it is the business of Christianity to conquer the malevolent element in the mythopoeic faculty, we must confess that it, too, has its failure to acknowledge. The priest as an educated man, Christian, specialist in the knowledge and practice of the Christian law, should have conquered the mythopoeic faculty better than any other type of man in the world. Who will claim that he has done so with conspicuous success?

It is well to keep in mind certain elementary facts and limitations of human nature which have a bearing on the priestly life as they have on all men. We are driven irresistibly toward interpretations of persons, events, processes. The awakened mind must be put at ease. We can not secure full objective explanations of motives, limitations, and intentions of others. If we must have explanations and we lack full information, imagination will become active and will invent gratuitous theories. It will be guided by personal attitudes, assumptions, prejudices, coincidences, and the like, and invent theories to explain facts. The course of life forces us into touch with every kind of friend, enemy, and critic; with leaders in Church and in State. Newspapers and magazines hurl at us constantly every kind of information and misinformation. The air is filled with rumors, explanations, and insinuations concerning everyone who attracts any attention. It is practically impossible to prevent ourselves from taking attitudes without thought and making interpretations without care. We are driven almost irresistibly to mythological explanations of every kind. If we add to our tendencies from within, this universal pressure from without, we see readily that it is almost impossible to be merely truth-seekers and escape the tyranny of imagination, dislike, temperament, partisanship in our explanations of the character and behavior of others.

In a general way, our personal mythology follows two directions. Our myths are either benevolent

or malevolent. They either exalt or diminish others. While both kinds are inevitable, there is infinitely less harm in the former than in the latter. The Christian, and above all the priest, has three lines of defence against malevolent myths. Unless he suppress and master them, his conduct will reflect little credit on the law of which he is the qualified exponent. The first defence against malevolent myths relating to others is Logic. That is to say, we should withhold belief in any myth that derogates from the dignity or character of any human being until indisputable evidence is forthcoming. The cultivated habit of unwillingness to believe evil of anyone or to impute it to anyone short of conclusive evidence is the foundation of Christian character. This is of course half of the law of charity. The value of this habit was brought to the attention of the country during the recent war, when representatives of the government asked us to follow to its source every rumor relating to war conditions. Instances of the grossest treachery and vilest propaganda were unearthed, and yet men and women of every degree of education, leadership, and power believed, and repeated these rumors with as little critical care as a savage might tell of wonders conjured up by his imagination.

We may place by the side of Logic the power of reverence for truth and for the good name of others. Unwillingness to recognize facts which disturb our prejudices is widespread. Desire to diminish their force or explain them away when they interfere with

our interests or ambition is equally common. Yet both traits are unworthy of our culture, not to speak of our faith. Now reverence for truth as truth and joy in everything that reflects honor on others will enable us to conquer every kind of malevolent myth and prepare us for the Christian life. Of what avail is prayer or expression of the love which is the fulfilling of the law, if the mythopoeic faculty is to be undisturbed in its action in our life.

The second defence that we have against malevolent myths is silence. Perhaps we are unable to control our minds against appearances, assumptions, plausibilities, and the like. Perhaps our views establish themselves in spite of us. In this case, we have at least the power of silence. Is not this the purpose of the commandment given by God, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor"? No doubt the observation of silence would kill all the myths of this kind in the world in a single generation.

The third defence held in mind is found in the development of intellectual interests of any kind that will refine life and purify the taste. The awakened mind must have objects of interest. If serious things do not engage the attention, trifling things will. The clerical mind which has no interest outside of the routine of clerical life is exposed to infection by every kind of myth. But the mind that has a range of cultured interests, not to speak of souls and theology, will never be at a loss in either thought or conversation to account for its time nobly, and be redeemed



from the dreadful scourge of gossip and spreading of evil report. Those who might enjoy the task will find an interesting revelation of the way in which a mind can protect itself against malevolent myths by studying the puzzling character of Tom Pinch in *Martin Chuzzlewit*.

There are two aspects of clerical mythology that are worthy of some thought. The priest may become a myth to himself. That is to say, he gives a fictional and conjectural narrative of himself to himself and takes it so seriously that he judges the world from this standpoint. His rights, his wrongs, his merits, his achievements, take on under the convenient magic of imagination a mythical amplitude that makes his figure colossal. All spiritual writers discuss this process from one or other point of view, though they may not give us such an understanding of the process as a psychologist might. If a priest exercises the powers of the priesthood without the vision of it, he is apt to drift into a mythical self-estimate. The spiritual vision of the priesthood, that is the vision which is truth, should correct our intellectual and moral limitations and make us priestly in view as well as power. St. John the Baptist has given us the law of all time in his words concerning his own relations with Christ. "Illum oportet crescere, me autem minui." Humility, patience, sympathy, docility, self-control, forgiveness, truth-loving are not make-believe attitudes that a priest may put on or off at will. They are

assured methods by which truth may be found and followed. Mythical self-estimates perish in the atmosphere where these traits flourish.

We find in clerical life what may be called the "bishop myth"; mythical explanations of motives, actions, and attitudes of the bishop. Let us keep in mind that the myth is a fictional and conjectural explanation of facts or persons with little or no basis in fact. When the motives of a bishop are imagined and declared, the speaker too often has no basis in fact. What a bishop does or omits is taken as a text on which misdirected imagination does prolific work of interpretation. At times, ambitions are imputed and intentions are ascribed of which the bishop is entirely innocent. Thus the priest may create a mythical bishop who has no existence, and the former adapts his attitudes, comment, and course of action to the mythical figure that he has created. The bishop is an important factor in the priest's life. Curiosity, native to all of us, drives the latter toward theories which explain the former and bring mental rest. Where reliable information is lacking, imagination takes up its work. The work is purely mythical, not scientific. There is no logic or painstaking care in interpretation. Surely the way toward clerical happiness and peace of mind lies in the suppression of the mythopoeic faculty in respect of a bishop.

This is said, not by way of a brief for bishops, but in the interest of the culture, peace, and truth instinct of the priest himself. The priest who is misled by

coincidences, conjectures, assumptions; by temperament, dislike, or ambition, and permits these to replace information in the making of his judgments, will know no peace and misunderstand the world. If the priest has an impression that the bishop may from time to time form mythological impressions of him, the suggestion is worth examining, but that falls beyond the scope now held in mind.

The wisest among us are reasonable only at times. Feeling, imagination, and fancied interpretations maintain their sway in life in spite of our intelligence and graces. When, however, we recognize this as fundamental, we discover new force in the laws of the Christian life and new meanings in the virtues which it demands. If we place intelligence and charity on guard, and recognize the danger of betrayal by our emotions, dislikes, and preferences, we shall gradually acquire the reverence for truth which makes us free and the graces of truth which curb the mythopoeic faculty and redeem us from its unsuspected tyranny.

## VIII

### THE SERMON, THE CONGREGATION, AND THE PREACHER

**T**HE ideal result of preaching is realized when an excellent sermon is preached to a sympathetic congregation by a capable preacher. If fault be found in the sermon or the congregation or the preacher, effort is to that extent wasted. Only in the happy conjunction of all three elements do we find full spiritual profit. A good sermon is a blessing to all who hear it. A dull sermon is an affliction. A congregation which takes a mistaken attitude toward preaching will rarely find spiritual profit in any sermon whatsoever. A congregation may be well disposed and an excellent sermon may be at hand. If it is delivered badly it becomes a spiritual trial. If it is delivered well it is an inspiration. Many of those who find indiscriminate fault with preaching overlook the fundamental fact that at best the preacher can control only himself and his sermon. He cannot control the general attitude of the congregation. Of course, the charms of intelligence and eloquence are supreme. The exceptional preacher blessed with both gifts will nearly always dominate any congregation which he addresses. But the average preacher



who might be highly effective with a sympathetic congregation is baffled when his gifts are not great enough to overcome perverted attitudes toward preaching in general. When the spiritual sense is dulled and flippant indifference is widespread, no preaching will avail.

### THE SERMON

It is not easy to discover the exact place of the sermon in our organized religious life. Whether its mission is to convey instruction, to chasten the sinner, to deal from an apologetic standpoint with Catholic dogma, to serve as an agency for high moral appeal and spiritual awakening, is not quite clear to either the average preacher or the average congregation. Perhaps it is the function of the sermon to do all of these and anything else in addition which will promote the welfare of souls. Nevertheless a clear understanding of the uses of the sermon is necessary if it is to be efficacious. Fairly wide inquiry made among the laity and the clergy failed to bring forth any clear understanding of what preaching had meant in the lives of those consulted. The uses of oratory vary as times vary. Hence, the uses of the sermon in organized Church life will change in response to changed conditions. Sermons in Sunday newspapers, enriched by every charm of style and scholarship, kill interest in an indifferent sermon from the pulpit, particularly if the preacher is indifferent to the power of both style and scholarship.

The circumstances of Sunday Mass have played havoc with preaching. Where a congregation is large and Mass is celebrated every hour from sunrise until noon, one congregation must depart before another enters. Promiscuous announcements must be made. Many Communions must be distributed. The forenoon schedule is prepared so exactly that only ten or twelve minutes will be allowed for a sermon. The preacher vies with the congregation in eagerness to be done with it. If there is leisure for a longer sermon at a late Mass or in the evening, there is little disposition to welcome it, and there are systematic efforts to avoid it. The sermon is crowded into such narrow quarters that it loses prestige. It is in bad repute. On the whole, people take an attitude of mild suspicion or amiable toleration toward it. A joke went the rounds of the press recently to the effect that short sermons, "sermonettes," are very popular in summer—and also in autumn, winter, and spring. On a certain occasion a lecturer was invited to address a highly educated audience. A member of the committee which extended the invitation told him that the lecture might be moral, provided it was not offensive. He chose a literary subject in whose title the word "virtue" appeared. He lectured to empty seats. He was informed later that the prospective audience feared that a sermon was to be preached and remained away.

To an extent preaching has lost its prestige among clergymen themselves. The habit of preaching with-

out preparation, and the pleasant tone in which we invite a fellow priest to "say a few words," indicate that we have failed to hold the sermon secure in its high place as the historical method of expounding Revelation and rousing human hearts to supreme efforts in their sanctification. Long sermons, unreasonable sermons, tiresome sermons, superficial sermons, preached without judgment and at times without heart, have done their share in reducing the pulpit from its high Christian estate to a lowly place which robs it of so much of its power.

Let no one think for a moment that all of the fault may be laid upon the shoulders of the clergy. Far from it. When preaching is supported by current social indignations and aspirations it is powerful to the highest degree. But when the indignations of society do not concern themselves about the sins of the world, and our aspirations set the things of the soul far distant in the perspective of life, the preacher faces a situation which average ability in the pulpit cannot master. If the world loses the sense of truth and becomes indifferent to error of whatsoever kind, he who preaches truth may expect but little enthusiasm from those who hear. A related situation occurs as regards standards and doctrines which touch life directly. We live in a time of colossal social injustice. But exact determination of justice baffles the genius of the race. The attempts of the United States government during the war to fix prices show us the imperative need of exact standards and the

practical impossibility of determining them. Now in as far as the preacher takes up questions of social injustice he will be driven to speak in very general and vague terms. This will give his preaching a certain emotional force, but it will do little in furnishing the direction needed for the formation of conscience in everyday life. Again, the average congregation represents every walk in life and many rugged social contrasts. It is difficult to preach with direct force without appearing to give very great offence which will be felt and resented deeply. Nathan's direct method with David was in personal contact, not in a sermon. As a result of circumstances of these kinds sermons gravitate toward individual personal aspects of morality and toward general terms. This sets the pulpit in second place in the formation of the conscience of the world, and it places every preacher who enters the pulpit under a discouraging handicap.

The sermon should be studied in the light of all of its bearings in our organized religious life. There is much difference between the early morning five-minute instruction and a powerful sermon delivered on a great occasion. There will be differences in style, spirit, and content between the familiar talk to a sodality or other parish organization on the one hand and a general congregation on the other. There will be many differences between an instruction on points of doctrine and a profound moral appeal intended to set forth the ideals of Christian life in their



most compelling splendor. Our failure to recognize these differences and to adapt, with thoughtful care, style, content, and spirit to purpose is both our fault and our misfortune. Perhaps our greatest mistake has been to associate rambling announcements of every kind with the actual delivery of sermons in the pulpit. The printed record of everything said in three hundred city churches on a given Sunday would make a searching commentary on the place of the pulpit in the present-day world. Our failure to distinguish types of preaching, their real function, and their relation to other forms of instruction and appeal, is inexcusable.

### THE CONGREGATION

The following is found in a life of John Bunyan. "One day the minister preached against Sabbath breaking and Bunyan, who used especially to follow his sports on Sundays, fell in conscience under that sermon, verily believed that it was intended for him and feeling what guilt was, which he could not remember that he had ever felt before. Home he went with a great burden upon his spirit; but dinner removed that burden; his animal spirits recovered from their depression; he shook the sermon out of his mind, and away he went with great delight, to his old sports." Bunyan's experience was typical. The power and the limitations of sermons are exactly indicated in it. Conversion and spiritual aspiration may be traced in many lives to a single sermon, rarely to a series of

sermons. The average attitude toward sermons found in the modern congregation is that of an unconcerned impersonal observer. The sermon is a church tradition. It is to be accepted like other church traditions. The people submit if it is tiresome and listen contentedly if it is interesting. When it is over, as when High Mass is over, the matter is at an end. The comments heard as congregations pour forth from the church after sermons, show the point of view from which the sermon was heard. It was "grand," "fine," "enjoyed," "tiresome," "useless," "preached before." Not often do we see the people depart from the church with their heads bent in quiet sorrow for sin or with eyes brilliant with renewed assurance of spiritual peace and reenforced dependence upon the benevolence of God. Not often do the hearers depart with the comforting sense of spiritual understanding, with new and convincing light on the mysteries of doctrine, with helpful self-knowledge and strengthened resolution. Not often do the hearers depart feeling that the priest who addressed them had peered into their hearts, had spoken with unaccustomed authority, and had shown the spiritual mastery for which they longed. Like John Bunyan, most of us lose what the sermon gave us, through the comforting influence of a good dinner.

Let us relieve the preacher of blame and attempt to find the cause of this condition elsewhere. Social customs tyrannize over us. We are forbidden to

express our deeper spiritual emotions in public. A conventional deference toward others and conventional understanding of privacy impose self-restraint upon us. They forbid us to express our inner spiritual experience. The habit therefore of suppressing religious emotions tends to paralyze us. This process creates an attitude which causes a back pressure against the effect of the sermon and leaves us hardened. Just as we behold a wholesome play and enjoy its art impersonally without improving character, we find genuine spiritual joy in hearing a good sermon but carry little permanent effect from it into daily life. Apropos of the customary question, "How did you like the Sermon?" the *Northwestern Christian Advocate* was quoted recently, as follows:

Asking that question has become a habit which it will probably take centuries to eradicate. It is a demon which can be cast out only by prayer and fasting. No wonder spiritual results of preaching are so meagre. What can be expected from preaching unless laymen realize that they are to follow up the work of persuasion by driving home the word set forth by the preacher? Sermons are not toys to be played with, or pretty pieces of rhetoric on which every member of the congregation is expected to pass judgment. A sermon is not an exquisite bit of literary bric-à-brac to be chattered over and judged by the technical rules of art. It is not a dumpling into which every self-constituted critic is invited to stick his fork that he may praise or condemn the cook. A sermon is a solemn warning, a bugle-call to duty, a burning condemnation, an earnest

stroke against a giant wrong, an exhortation to high endeavor, the illumination of a majestic truth. Sermons are preached, not to be liked, but to be accepted and lived. Suppose, pray, you did not like the sermon! What of it? The preachers in the New Testament were not anxious that their sermons should be liked.

Never ask that insipid question, "How did you like the sermon?" Such a question injures the one who asks it, and debauches the person who answers. It trains men to measure sermons by false standards, and to seek for entertainment rather than for truth.

Suppression of spiritual emotion is one factor that neutralizes the effect of preaching. Another factor is found in the circumstance that our religious activity is organized in cycles and is thereby robbed of much spontaneity. We live and think and judge ourselves spiritually from Communion to Communion, from confession to confession, from ecclesiastical season to ecclesiastical season, from Sunday Mass to Sunday Mass. These spiritual nodes lead us to think backward to one time and forward to another, and they rob us of the impulse to act out a spiritual emotion at the time we feel it. If a man is stirred profoundly by a sermon, his impulse to change his way of living will be checked by his habit of going to confession only at stated periods. When confession day arrives, the bounding impulse which had been awakened by a sermon may have lost its strength. Perhaps the fatherly heart of Pius X fostered the hope that daily Communion might put an end to these



cycles or periods in our spiritual life and hold it permanently on a higher level.

A third factor in the general attitude of the congregation is found in the vague assurance of present possession of truth and of easy opportunity for reform when it is wished. We miss in the people an attitude of solicitude for the truth, an eagerness to know more and more about God and His ways and the mysteries of life. There results from our definiteness of doctrine and worship an attitude of spiritual quiet and assurance which is often mistaken for indifference. It is really assurance, not indifference. Of course, definiteness is a mental opiate. Religion takes on its full meaning in our experience from our sense of the need of it. If we feel that we have need of sermons, they become all-powerful to us. If we feel that we do not need the sermon, either for instruction or emotional awakening, we look upon it as a spiritual luxury. There are very many who would be conscious of no spiritual loss whatever if they heard no sermons. How can any preacher help those who are thus minded?

Three elements in the attitude of the congregation have been mentioned; conventional suppression of aroused spiritual emotion, obedience to it at only stated times which involves habitual postponement of action; lack of a sense of real spiritual need of sermons owing to definiteness that is the result of spiritual assurance. No desire is felt to force these observations further than facts warrant. The in-

quiries made in the preparation of this study show that the three elements are widespread and active. In order to determine more accurately their force, we have need of a background in which to judge the sermon. It is supplied in the parish mission.

The mission has been so organized into the life of Catholics as to have become a spiritual New Year's Day. The emotions, practices, inspirations, and sentiment that we attach to the New Year cluster around the mission as a time of spiritual renewal. Many who have been indifferent to their religious duties resume faithfully the practice of them at the time of a mission. Those who have been faithful make resolutions to rise to still nobler things. Timid sinners who wish to repent but are ashamed to do so because it makes them conspicuous, become brave and sensible at the time of a mission. They are unashamed of the tears which gratitude and joy sprinkle about them like an "asperges," making them "whiter than snow." The solicitude of friends who have hoped to win back loved ones who have wandered, finds new courage and occasion for urging at the time of a mission. The pastor takes opportunity to arouse the better self in each member of the congregation. One would have difficulty in finding out the range of awakened spiritual impulse and renewed spiritual life that must be credited to parish missions. One would not find it easy to count the luminous pathways of those who have never departed from the better life thus begun. Who shall count the

hearts to which happiness has been restored, the homes to which peace has returned, the hearts to which Christ has come back as to loved and purified tabernacles? Blessed be he to whom we owe the parish mission.

The mission draws out the consciousness of spiritual unity of the parish. It reasserts the supernatural in life. It becomes the chief topic of conversation at the family table. Happy surprise and wholesome edification are found in everything that occurs. Spiritual sensibilities are made acute. Good impulses, no longer held in leash, play freely on the sunlit plains of the soul, ecstatic in their new-found strength. The moral enthusiasms of younger and holier days are saved from the creeping paralysis of indifferent years and their full spiritual vigor is brought back to them. Every faculty within one helps grace to drive enemies from within the ramparts of the soul. The better self recovers its jurisdiction over life. It becomes again the spiritual monarch ruling in the name of God.

The sermon is the supreme weapon of the missionary. The preacher is a specialist in preaching. Sermons are well prepared. The congregation is in an ideal mood to hear the sermon and obey its touch. Souls are alert and well disposed, ready for contrition, eager for guidance toward higher spiritual levels whose charm had been obscured by the dust of the world, if not by the storm clouds of passion and sin. Those who had wandered away ask to be led back to

the assured safety of peaceful valleys lit by the Presence of God. Two-thirds of the power of the mission sermon is in the attitude of the congregation, not in the sermon itself, nor in the preacher.

The parish mission is so organized and its atmosphere is so constituted that advantage is taken immediately of every effect of preaching. Souls that feel called to better things may at once seek advice and find it. The sinner whose conscience is aroused may make his peace with God and find happiness before the evening Angelus marks the close of day. The confessional is open from morning until midnight. Qualified directors of souls, free from all distracting cares of parish management, specialists in the work, are at everyone's service throughout the day and into the night. One is no longer supposed to suppress spiritual emotion because good form requires it. One feels no impulse to postpone action until some remote confession day. One feels no longer contented with the easy assurance toward which one drifts in ordinary times. The sermon comes into its own. It is well prepared and well delivered. It is preached to a congregation that is open-minded, in which everyone is eager for guidance and strength. The supernatural is seen again and every one of its compelling claims is recognized with faithful zeal. The picture gives to us at least an intimation of the scenes in Galilee when our Lord was preacher and His sermons were incomparable masterpieces of Divine wisdom, and weary eyes looked into the Divine countenance of



God as He brought peace and assurance to many burdened hearts.

### THE PREACHER

Many discouraging remarks are heard about modern preaching. There are now so many types of capable lecturers, such evidences of learning and instances of attractive style, that the pulpit orator is compelled to attain to a high degree of excellence before he attracts the attention that gives him power. Our impression as to the scarcity of high-grade preachers may be due to the fact that we have many excellent preachers. Where there is a high average of excellence in any line the supply of greatness seems to diminish. Furthermore, the preacher has no longer any semblance of monopoly in the propaganda of moral and spiritual ideals. Social workers of every type, scholars, statesmen, and newspapers, magazines, and an increasing number of admirably written works, are devoted to moral and social propaganda in a way to diminish the actual as well as the relative rôle of pulpit oratory.

No priest and no one else can do his best all the time. No one is called upon to do so. But every priest ought to understand his powers as well as his limitations. He ought to know the kind of sermon that he can preach with best effect. The preacher should respect his own limitations and accept them as signs of the negative Will of God. St. Francis de

Sales, in his altogether delightful letter to the Archbishop of Bourges on the art of preaching, covers this point admirably. "A preacher always knows enough when he does not wish to seem to know more than he does know. If we do not know how to speak well on the mysteries of the Trinity, let us say nothing about it. If we are not well equipped for explaining the '*In the beginning*,' then let us leave it alone. There is no lack of other topics more useful; there is no obligation to do everything." The priest's entire career as a preacher ought to be understood and kept in mind systematically. He should assemble in his library the sources of which he has need. He should organize his reading and study as these bear on his grasp of spiritual truth and increase his power to declare it. He should foster the deep moral passion which is the single source of power for all preaching. He should have a decent respect for standards of style, composition, and delivery. He should be willing to spare no pains to add charm of voice and delivery and composition to those of divine truth in standing as the representative of God to deliver to God's children the divine message. Every priest has had opportunity to learn and realize the sacredness of the work of preaching. Every priest has had opportunity to fit himself for the work. Every priest knows that not arbitrary assumptions and preferences but definite laws of psychology and expected graces condition his efficiency in doing this duty. Every priest is exposed to the danger of mak-

ing certain mistakes which hinder him from doing the work of God as God would have it done.

Cardinal Newman tells us, as we well know, that men, not angels, are the ministers of the Gospel. A pastor's congregation tends to become commonplace to him. He looks into the same faces Sunday after Sunday and year after year. This experience may dull the sense of profound reverence which every priest should feel toward all human souls, but particularly toward those committed to his immediate charge. A pastor who is reasonably faithful will be conscious of stimulation to much greater effort in preaching when he addresses a congregation other than his own, or appears at a public gathering for some purpose not definitely religious. It requires no little watchfulness and the greatest industry for a pastor to find in his own congregation sufficient occasion to give the best that is in him every time he appears in the pulpit. Only great occasions call forth great orations. Theoretically an emergency is always at hand, eternity always at stake in every life. But it is impossible for us to realize this or act upon it.

The pastor is exposed also to the fallacy of underrating the intelligence of his congregation and of overrating the effect of his own mediocre efforts. A scholar has well said that the simplest results of thinking are not the results of simple thinking. Pastors may assume that there is not much need of effort or deep thinking or wide reading to prepare sermons for their flocks. But no priest who understands the

simplicity and power of Christ's words, who is filled with honest reverence for souls, can believe that a superficial talk, quite unprepared, can mean as much as a sermon into whose preparation prayer, effort, and reading have entered.

Another difficulty, perhaps the most serious one which a priest meets, results from indiscriminate praise of everything that he says in the pulpit. Any public speaker who has normal human impulses likes to be told that he has done well, and suffers when told that he has done badly. If the people had courage enough to withhold praise except when it is deserved, and if they had intelligence enough to realize when it is deserved, preaching would be transformed in a year. I do not believe that a preacher can do his best unless he find out in some way the real effect of his preaching in human lives. How to obtain that knowledge without being hurt by the process is a problem for which no solution is at hand unless the preacher can have an intelligent and friendly critic who fears not to tell the truth.

There is such an abundance of literature on pulpit oratory, on sermon writing and the faults of preachers, that it seems gratuitous to add to it; and yet our preaching has not reached a degree of excellence that this abundance should have made possible and the dignity of the work should have made sure. In a certain sense a priest can preach only himself. His sermons are part of his life. They declare the spiritual views which he holds. Every time that he



addresses with deliberate care his congregation, he reveals just what he thinks of human souls, just what he aims at and just what he is. There is no escape. Only a careless man preaches a careless sermon. Only a superficial man preaches a superficial sermon. Only a reverent and faithful priest preaches a sermon whose spirit breathes reverence and invites loyalty to God.

The priest who is luminously certain of God and of himself, who realizes that every day should show some new unfolding of the majesty and power of God, will never lack material for preaching, nor power in his words. The priest who saves himself from the deadly paralysis of routine and who quickens the springs of life in his daily meditation and prayer will be humble, industrious, and painstaking in everything that he does. He will find both reason and occasion for putting into his sermons the best that is in him, as nothing else than that is worthy of the Divine Master for whom He speaks.

## IX

### THE PRIEST AND THE EXCEPTIONAL SOUL

**T**HE priest is the representative of God to the individual soul in the organized ministry of the Church. We think of him and speak of him as pastor of the parish. The term "parish" brings to mind a section of a city, a large number of Catholic families, collective worship, and other activities in parish buildings. The parish is a group. Views, traditions, spirit take on a form of systematic unity which becomes definite to imagination and thought.

The pastor is profoundly influenced by his collective impression of the parish as a whole. All of the arrangements for worship, for meetings of societies, the parish school, and related activities reflect the needs and the unity of the congregation as a whole. It is not surprising, therefore, that the pastor is inclined to replace particular and detailed knowledge of each member of the congregation by an average impression of all those who are subject to his care. Thus he develops an impression of what may be called the average soul. He preaches to this imagined average soul. His interpretations of experience, of sin and suffering, of need and capacity, are governed largely by assumptions drawn from general impressions.

There is built up then within the mind of the pastor a medium through which he looks at individuals and deals with them. Judgment is so often correct, and the guidance given is so often what is needed, that priests sometimes lose the power of seeing and discovering the real individual. They see him as one of a class or type.

We speak habitually of the average father, the average mother, the average child, the average German or Irishman. There is no reason why we should not speak of the average soul. In as far as experience, problems, temptations, capacities are alike in many lives, in understanding one of them, we understand all of them. Thus the collective impression of the average soul is founded in fact. One feels and thinks like another. Aspirations are easily understood because they are widely shared. There is found in the community a certain average of spiritual development and moral sense which tends to become practically the conscience of the average soul. Ordinary duties are performed with ordinary loyalty. Average provisions for worship and devotion satisfy this type of soul completely. A fairly intelligent priest whose zeal and judgment are worthy of his training will have little difficulty in dealing successfully with such average souls. Hence, the understanding of the collective soul of the parish, of collective needs and capacity, assures effective priestly service to that extent.

There is a saying among scientists that hope of

progress in a science lies in unclassified remnants. That is to say, the challenge to science is in the things that are not yet explained, whereas its triumphs are in those that have been explained. Vigorous minds are stimulated more by a challenge than by a triumph. While average arrangements for worship and spiritual direction in a parish may satisfy nearly all of its members, there will be ordinarily some who are not reached, not content, not adequately provided for by average arrangements. These are the exceptional souls. They are in a sense the unclassified remnants. They present a supreme challenge to our wisdom and sympathy. The priest who can recognize an exceptional soul when he meets it, who can understand it and deal with it in the light of its own exceptional needs without being misled by his average assumptions concerning average souls, is surely a master in Israel.

The exceptional soul is one whose experience, temperament, needs or capacities isolate it from the collective life of the parish, leaving it strangely alone. Parish arrangements bring it little comfort because it seems to stand apart from the current of parish life. It is sensitive, reserved, self-conscious. The routine of worship falls short of its needs because it has greater needs or greater capacities than those thus satisfied. Spiritual platitudes, uttered in the pulpit or in conversation, which really bring guidance and hope to an average soul, seem useless, even repellent to the more sensitive ears and eager minds of excep-



tional souls. They bring to these no light, no peace. The exceptional soul craves to be understood, while the average soul assumes that it is understood. The latter is satisfied by the word as spoken, but the former searches through the heart of the speaker to find the wisdom and vision of which words are but the symbol. When the pastor possesses the gift of discovering the individual, of interpreting heart and soul directly, he becomes master and prophet. When he is indifferent to the exceptional soul, incapable of understanding it or insistent in his misunderstanding of it, he loses all power to serve or guide it. It might not be unfair to judge the average pastor by his power to discover, attract or repel exceptional souls. If he is superficial, without spiritual ambition and discernment, or discouraging, he will repel such souls. If he is arbitrary and without sympathetic understanding, they will flee him. But the pastor that has sympathy, understanding, and patience, will attract and inspire them and be their tower of strength. Discernment of souls is never more a gift than when it enables a priest to recognize and help an exceptional soul.

Pastors make the mistake of assuming that these exceptional souls are cranks or bores. The least deserving of them deserve much time and patient effort. The hurry and cares of parochial life leave many pastors indisposed to give the leisure and care that these souls demand. Sometimes we are tempted to impatience because they reveal to us our limita-

tions of understanding and our ignorance of the literature in which their guidance must be studied. Hasty judgment is always to be deplored. Sometimes souls are made exceptional through processes of life that are in the keeping of God. Sometimes they are made exceptional by mistakes in spiritual direction in early life. Opportunity then is given to us to correct the injustice that has come to them from a priestly hand. Surely a sense of the solidarity of the priesthood should dispose us to be generous here. Again, souls are made exceptional not by suffering or hurry but by grace and special capacity. It would be a tragedy in the life of any priest to classify as a crank or a bore one whom God destined to heights of sanctity.

The principles that should govern a priest in dealing with exceptional souls are simple. He should qualify himself to discover them when he meets them. He should assume responsibility in their direction without hesitation or evasion, when he is capable of doing so. When he finds that his endowments do not qualify him to deal with a particular soul, it is his duty in justice and mercy to find for that soul another director who is qualified. A pastor should never be reluctant to admit his own limitations for work of this kind. On the other hand he should not have the weakness to refuse the responsibility which he meets, nor should he on account of disinclination or laziness pass on to a fellow priest a duty of this kind which the Providence of God has brought to him. The litera-

ture which deals with methods to be followed in directing exceptional souls is abundant and satisfying. The pastor surely has the duty of making himself familiar with it.

It may be worth while to indicate types of exceptional souls if one may be permitted to say that there are types.

There is a type of soul made exceptional through resentment against a priest or perhaps a bishop or against the Church itself on account of some disciplinary regulation to which exception has been taken. Many of us have had the sad experience of meeting those who had been "driven out of the Church." It is not important for a priest who meets a soul of this type to determine the right or the wrong in the situation. It is the business of the pastor to overcome the resentment from which the soul suffers and bring back to it the sacramental peace of faith. Good business men assume that in a misunderstanding with a customer, the latter is always right. That policy pays. No harm is done when a priest who meets this type waives the question of blame in the hope of replacing the distractions of resentment by the consolations of peaceful faith. Unfortunately, we may not assume that the representative of the Church is always right. Now and then souls will be alienated through inexcusable mistakes of the pastor himself. It would do no harm if at annual retreats priests were to examine themselves with

scrupulous care as to the chance of having been unjust to members of their own flock and of having failed in the humility and sense of justice which would lead them to make manly apology and spare no effort to correct mistakes. I know of one instance where a thoroughly representative Catholic ceased to go to Mass on account of a misunderstanding with his pastor. A friend of the former in another city who had himself just been reconciled to the Church said to him: "Either you are right or you are wrong. If you are right, compel the pastor to apologize. If you are wrong, go and make an apology." After reflecting, the gentleman wrote a letter to the pastor offering either to receive or make an apology, leaving the decision to the latter. The pastor was equal to the occasion. He made an apology and restored happiest relations. There is not much in the clerical psychology that makes apology easy to the priest who is at fault. But surely the grace of the sacerdotal state should supply the strength that nature denies, when there is question of preserving faith and doing justice to a human soul.

Another type of exceptional soul is found when one feels temperamental aversion for a doctrine of the Church. Its Divine authority is really not brought into question, nor is the soul lacking in docility. The case is one wherein temperament and sympathy combine with lack of understanding and awaken an aversion which is as disturbing as it is unwelcome. There are those for instance who feel



aversion from the doctrine of eternal punishment in hell, from the theological opinion about the fate of unbaptized children, from the supposed doctrine of the Church concerning salvation of those outside her pale. In cases of this kind scolding avails nothing. It is a mistake to assume that the attitude has been taken deliberately or that there is the slightest self-satisfaction in it. It is the business of the pastor to study with greatest care the antecedents of it and to spare no pains in endeavoring to win the mind over to a saner view. Nothing could be less wise than to assume that the person in question is alone at fault or that a mere act of the will could correct it. There is a touch of rare humor in the story of an Irishman who had lost belief in the doctrine of hell. Argument brought no relief, but when the pastor asked the offender where a certain historical enemy of Ireland now is, belief in hell was restored immediately.

In a related type of soul we find a beginning of the loss of faith as both a grace and a mental attitude. Some subtle process that escaped attention of both victim and pastor set in and the harm had been done before its presence was suspected. This process may result from neglect of prayer, from misguided reading, from unwholesome companions, from personal experience, from the baneful influence of others who studied to undermine faith by ridicule, argument, or insinuation. It may sometimes occur as the result of conscious sin, but it is a mistake to assume that

this is always an adequate explanation. Cases of this kind call for tedious study of their history and for careful observation no less than understanding of mental processes. Throughout the entire study of such a case, the intelligence, good faith, and self-respect of the sufferer must be scrupulously safeguarded. I have known cases where greatest good will, glad compliance with every suggestion offered, and practice involving stern self-discipline proved that the sufferer neglected nothing that might help to bring back faith and peace. Yet something stood in the way: faith delayed its return.

We have pressing need of careful study of the occasional instances of loss of faith which are to be met in these days. There is such variety among them and their mental and emotional histories are so complicated that superficial observation and ready-made views of causes and remedies are pitiably inadequate. The difficulties increase by the fact that the sufferer often misunderstands totally the deeper causes of loss of faith, and misleads unintentionally those from whom assistance might come. There is not a more subtle spiritual problem confronting the priest than that of dealing with a soul which has lost, or all but lost, faith. "Superficial difficulties which appear as the representing symptoms, so to speak, are not the real ones. They may be answered entirely to the person's satisfaction and have absolutely no effect upon the restoration of faith." One must "pay little attention to the apparent difficulties and seek

the underlying cause. It will often be found in the moral life of the individual. The reason why these cases run such a chronic incurable course is that to cure them means a moral reformation; an entire making over of personality. Few confessors realize what patience and expenditure of time this means and fewer still would be able and willing to make the sacrifice that it entails." (The Rev. Dr. Thomas V. Moore, C.S.P., in *The American Catholic Quarterly Review*, October, 1917).

There is another type of soul that suffers acutely because of inability to understand the Providence of God. The mysteries of suffering, cruelty, degradation, disaster stagger souls of this kind. Unfortunately they drift into a mistaken philosophy of life. If the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; patience with the mysteries of life is its continuation. If one assumes that mysteries must be explained, one must expect much suffering and little understanding. Perhaps pastors make mistakes in attempting to explain the Providence of God, when they should confine their efforts to help one to accept its dictates with abiding faith and without understanding. There are at this moment not a few non-Christians who have been looking with kindly interest upon the Christian faith, but the horrors of the great war have driven them back into a chilling atheism. Their mistake was in the initial attitude that led them to ask an understanding of God's government of the world. Robinson Crusoe was covered with shame

and self-accusing humility when he found himself unable to answer Friday's question, "Why does not God kill devil?"

The most superficial review of the lives of the saints, or of the great believers that are found in every walk of life, shows us that simple, uncomplaining acceptance of the Providence of God has been the source of their wisdom and power. The existence of evil, the triumph of injustice, the immunity of wickedness from visible punishment, the agony of innocence, disaster striking noble men and noble women, seen in themselves, depress and confuse us. But when faith lifts our eyes and we see the wider vision of God's unfolding Providence, we are helped to bear the mystery and find repose in the appeal of our helplessness to the mercy of God.

When a pastor meets souls of this kind, he must undertake to find and correct the mistakes that have brought on their unrest. Perhaps no two cases will call for exactly the same kind of treatment. It is surely a duty of the pastor to recognize the type and to work with unflagging industry and tolerant zeal to find the remedy. Sometimes the personality of the priest himself will accomplish the miracle. Sometimes the effort of the soul to tell its own story to a sympathetic hearer brings the desired relief. Sometimes judicious reading, happy analogies, appeals to homely experience are sufficient.

There is another type of exceptional soul gifted with keen moral and spiritual sensibilities and unable



to reconcile itself to the ugliness of life and the faults of institutions. Such are idealists. They possess the temperament which gives us poet, orator, reformer, dreamer. Men and women of this type are caught by ideals and held to them. They judge the world and its complications in the fierce and steady light of perfection. They believe that they find warrant for this attitude in the text of the Gospel itself and in the marvellous character of Christ. Their demands on the Church are most exacting. Their impatience with the Church's patience toward human nature places them in such a frame of mind that average preaching, average Church ministrations, average Church attitudes toward sin and the sinner and faulty institutions, fail utterly to commend themselves. A pastor who dismisses this type of soul and assumes a superior air toward it thoroughly disqualifies himself to serve it. Very often a person of this kind will possess a range of information and instinctive understanding of social processes which place the pastor below the idealist. He is ethically ahead of his time, perhaps ahead of his pastor. I have known idealists of this type, cranks we call them, who have wandered from city to city, from state to state, seeking a priest who would listen with patient understanding and give answer to questions which tortured their souls. I have known such to receive scant courtesy indeed and to have shamed pastors by the patience and loyalty with which they continued their search until

they found understanding and direction that brought them peace.

Grave injustice is done sometimes to idealists and to social movements by pastors who lack understanding and fail to show elementary intelligence and justice in dealing with them. When a pastor meets types of this kind, if he cannot deal with them himself he should at least have the grace to seek out others who might do so. This ought to be done primarily for the sake of the direction of the soul that is in turmoil, leaving aside altogether for the moment all thought of the value of the idealist's dream in bringing about social justice.

There is another type of exceptional soul with which we are more familiar. It is that which has lost capacity for moral certainty. We say that such are scrupulous. They exaggerate all moral responsibilities and lack sense of finality in moral judgment. Everything that they think and say and do is brought into conscious and full relation to eternity. The process overwhelms mind and soul and causes acute distress. All moral laws are interpreted in a most exacting manner. Exemptions from customary spiritual and disciplinary regulations cannot be understood or are not trusted when they are understood. All sense of values between great and small is lost. The purest motives of the heart are seen in shadows that make them black. In proportion as spiritual self-confidence is lost, need of it increases. As a result, fears, illusions, exaggerations leave a trail

of confusion that causes unhappiness, impairs efficiency, and disqualifies the soul for the touch of spiritual peace.

Another type is found in the exceptional sinner. He is very good or very bad. There is no middle way. We find here a combination of sincere desire for goodness with temperamental inability to be good, unless a kindly hand is always within reach to encourage and save.

The pastor who is a good pastor—that is, a good shepherd—will know these his charges, and they will know him as understanding friend and comforting father. The pastor who through curtness, impatience, inexcusable mistakes of self-justifying indifference fails of every delicate duty which he has toward these children of God, will find little comfort in the memory of his dealing with them when he is called upon to give an account of his flock to the Good Shepherd whose representative he is.

No pastor should overlook souls blessed by God with exceptional capacity for spiritual development. They rise far above the average level of the community, because they are called to a deeper understanding of the ways of God, to more complete consecration, to more intimate sharing of His blessed spirit. It is the duty of the pastor to discover such and to interpret duty and spiritual opportunity to them. The routine of confession and Communion, of sodality meetings, and of systematic or of hap-

hazard service which satisfy the collective longings of the congregation leave these souls unnourished, unsatisfied. Very often they must be interpreted to themselves since they may not understand either their own spiritual capacity or the approved methods of developing it. If religion should be internal, personal, transforming for each of us, it must be all of that in a much higher degree to these exceptional souls. They have need of systematic spiritual direction as regards the interior life and of intelligent direction in spiritual reading and in the sensible adaptation of life to everyday duties and relations of the world about them. Among mothers, fathers, men and women in a typical city parish there will be found not a few who invite this particular attention and compensate it a hundredfold by the growth and holiness which they manifest without in any way becoming singular or attracting attention. One can scarcely find fault with those who would wish to develop a kind of lay religious community, scarcely recognized by those not informed, wherein kindred souls might find the spiritual atmosphere for which they crave.

The last type of exceptional soul to which reference will be made is that which has a vocation to the religious life. The pastor ought to be skilled in discovering and fostering vocations. He should bring to his ministry the most profound reverence for the religious life and a prayerful desire to cooperate with the plans of God in directing such souls wisely. The



priest who judges vocations superficially, who cannot see them where they do exist, or thinks that he sees them where they do not exist, is poorly equipped for his work. Pastors who discourage vocations or fail to instruct their congregations in the nature of the call to the religious life and the place of it in the Church, seem to miss part of the wisdom which is associated with their divine calling. The young are always timid in making the supreme decisions of life. They must be guided with discretion and in the spirit of impersonal service. There are some signs of vocation which are read with difficulty. There are complications among which the Will of God is hidden. The work of balancing conflicting claims of time and eternity, of preference and of duty, is not easy. A congregation in which vocations do not appear permits us to assume that the pastor's work has not been done completely. There is the problem of not only discovering and fostering vocations but also of understanding the type of religious life to which the soul may be called. Fortunately the literature on vocations and the religious life is rich enough and of such merit as to leave to the pastor no justification for misunderstanding or neglecting this duty.

The thought that underlies these pages is simple enough in itself, although the development of it has not been attempted without some timidity. In proportion as a pastor drifts toward views and impressions concerning average souls and adapts his philoso-

phy of life to them, he may lose the gift of discovering, understanding, and dealing wisely with the exceptional soul. It is the duty of a pastor to guard against this process and to hold himself in readiness to discover and to serve the exceptional soul in the light of its needs and its capacities. It may be said without fear of error that herein lies the supreme test of his intelligence, of his spiritual insight, and of his fitness to serve God in the priestly state.

## X

### ON CERTAIN ASPECTS OF SPIRITUAL LITERATURE

**S**PIRITUAL literature may be viewed from the standpoints of author, publisher, reviewer, and reader. Normally an author writes because he chooses to do so. He volunteers to say something which he feels deeply, knowledge of which offers spiritual advantage of some kind to the reader. Ventures in authorship are therefore self-imposed. The author takes on the rôle of teacher, assumes that he is qualified to carry it in respect of both thought and style. Neither zeal nor purity of motive nor high aim excuses a writer if he undertake work for which he is not equipped. An author no less than a grocer should have a conscience and standards. Of course, principles should be applied with sympathetic discrimination. It has been well said that a volume which helps any human soul, justifies its existence by that very fact. However, only when we insist on standards shall we have worthy results. Only when we withhold praise where there is no merit and give it with generous kindness where there is merit, can we build up a spiritual literature worthy of the name.

When a work is written, a publisher is sought. The publisher is a business man who is governed by business principles. He will undertake the publication of a volume if it promises to sell. He will decline if his critics tell him that it will not sell. The intrinsic merit of a spiritual work appeals to the publisher in only an indirect way. Thus the commercial motive plays a determining rôle in the output of spiritual literature, if we except spiritual literature distributed without thought of cost by missionary organizations or individuals in whom the love of God and of souls is paramount. The commercial motive operates in two directions. It discourages the production of spiritual literature which has little or no merit. In this way it serves the interests of the readers. On the other hand, it discourages the production of literature of a very high order when there is not promise of sufficient sales to make it pay. However, a large amount of spiritual literature approves itself to the publisher and in due time it is offered for sale. At this point author and publisher meet the reader in whom we are chiefly interested.

A book must be made known by advertising. It is the function of the reviewer to pass an honest judgment of a work. His condemnation hurts the sale, while his approval promotes it. The reviewer is supposed to be a qualified judge and to speak with honesty and intelligence. He may not permit the high motive of an author to blind him to the faults of a work, nor may he permit prejudice to obstruct his



view of its merits. There is an ethics in book reviewing as there is in trade or professions. The reviewer who is merely the advertising man for a publisher is really not a reviewer. His work is properly called a "blurb," to distinguish it from the *bona fide* estimate of the reviewer who aims to guide the public in its judgments. Fair critical estimates of new works, written by competent reviewers, perform a service that is practically indispensable.

It takes both a writer and a reader to make a book. A volume which does not gain readers fails in its mission. Now readers are governed largely by taste. Likes and dislikes control our choice of food for the body and as well for the soul. Just as there are certain essentials in nourishment concerning which we have little if any choice, there are essentials for the nourishment of the soul concerning which we should ask little if any choice. We have no freedom in determining whether or not we shall have knowledge of God, of our eternal destiny in Him, of duty which is the supreme law of life, of the virtues which draw us nearer to Christ, or of the processes of sin which destroy spiritual vision. There is therefore little play for taste as regards elementary spiritual truth, but there is much room for it as regards spiritual literature.

In course of the preparation of this study inquiries were made among a number who are well informed, as to their impressions about spiritual literature in general. Some said that they found it

uninteresting and barren. Others complained that it was uncritical as to both spiritual emotions and spiritual experience. Others declared that it was injured greatly by pure imagination, arbitrary conjecture, and badly supported inferences. Some claimed that the aim of edification was made to excuse many faults of thinking and of style. Some felt that it fails to take advantage of progress in fields of thought which touch spiritual life directly. Others thought that spiritual literature is too far removed from practical life, too exacting and mechanical. These are impressions rather than judgments. It would be a mistake to exaggerate their importance or force an arbitrary interpretation of them. They indicate to some extent the failure of certain kinds of literature to help us in the work of personal sanctification, and hint at lines along which progress may be asked.

Now there is not a need of the human soul which cannot be fully satisfied in our spiritual literature, nor is there any charm of style that will not be found in it in reasonable abundance. All that is necessary is that we be sufficiently interested in our souls to know what we need as well as what we wish, to look for it, to find it and profit by it in the upbuilding of character and in the unfolding of the Revelation of Christ to our confused souls. It is to be regretted that there are many that can be misled by superficial impressions and remain indifferent to all spiritual literature because its most choice forms do not pre-

sent themselves as the reward of lazy search. That our spiritual literature has some faults is beyond question. That our book reviewers are frequently uncritical in their praise of spiritual works is beyond question. But the priest who complains about the quality of spiritual literature in excusing himself for unfamiliarity with it, writes down an unmistakable indictment of himself and shows that his judgment is scarcely worth considering. Why is there not in the priesthood a more helpful appreciation of spiritual literature than we now find? Why do so many libraries represent effective advertising or patient bearing with the importunities of book agents rather than the seeking of the priestly soul for guidance to spiritual heights. Answer would require a wider review of clerical life and character than may be now attempted. Certain observations may be offered which bear on the problem without pretending to find the whole answer.

Some priests are unfair to spiritual literature because of their lack of spiritual taste. The soul has its own atmosphere and terminology. Unless the priest is interested in his own soul, he will not be interested in the literature that is written for souls. One may distinguish between professional and personal interest in one's soul. The priest deals with souls. He is constantly anxious for the spiritual welfare of every one committed to his care. But this interest tends to organize into a form of routine. The conduct of worship, the administration of the Sacraments, per-

sonal solicitude for the maintenance of the auxiliaries to spiritual life may loom up in a way to exclude the vision of wider spiritual life in the individual soul. It may also react upon the priest himself and lead him to deal with his own soul in the terms of similar routine. Thus the priest may find in the doing of parish duties, in daily Mass and the reading of the Breviary, a routine self-estimate which brings to him dwarfing contentment, with scarcely a thought of the broad savannas of the soul which lie beyond.

It is possible for the priest to be so satisfied with this simplification of his own problems as to prevent that growth in the holiness toward which all priestly graces are directed; graces which come from the heart of Christ, touch the priestly soul, and then return to God bearers of priestly aspiration and love. Now it is only in proportion as the priest is conscious of his own soul and its possibilities beyond routine, that he will possess spiritual taste or feel that longing for spiritual growth which is proof of the indwelling of the spirit of God. They who write about the wider life of the soul and offer vision of truths and opportunities beyond the range of careless glancing will possess no charm and offer no message to the priest who does not rise above the depressed level of routine. But one whose soul is the dear companion of daily thought and aspiration will hunger for truth and insight. He will seek it and find it and be happy in its possession. He will bring discernment to the choice of spiritual literature and never be without



books which guide and cheer him in his daily life. He will know what he wishes and will seek it out. He will be unconcerned about real or alleged shortcomings of spiritual literature because his soul will find unerringly what it seeks and needs.

Some priests are unfair to spiritual literature because of a mistaken attitude. They feel that they should do a certain amount of spiritual reading, but they are unconcerned as to its results. If they spend an hour daily with a spiritual treatise of any kind in hand and read it mechanically, they feel that they satisfy this obligation. What is read to-day may be unrelated to what was read yesterday and to what will be read to-morrow. This is not spiritual reading at all. The reading of a spiritual treatise is one incident in the complex work of upbuilding spiritual life. It is related to prayer and meditation and is in one way or another a factor in the normal process of acquiring truth and grace. What is read must be organized into life. When this is done one acquires the talent of finding spiritual reading everywhere. Until it is done one finds no spiritual reading anywhere, not even in the Gospel itself. One who is of this type should hesitate to express any opinion of spiritual literature because he lacks the only insight into its function which would enable him to have any judgment at all.

Another element in the problem is found in the wide superficial knowledge that the priest has of the whole field of spiritual truth. He is acquainted with the terms and perhaps with the substance found in a

volume which he takes in hand. After superficial examination he feels that he knows everything contained in it and lays it down with the thought that it has no message whatever for him. We read no volume with interest except we accord to its author some kind of superiority. It may rest on charm of style or range of information or depth of insight, novelty of presentation or power of analysis or expression. A book renders its intended service only when the writer appears as one having authority and the reader is willing to learn. A priest who believes that a volume can teach him nothing will ordinarily get nothing out of it. The unreflecting assumption that a priest's general knowledge of spiritual truth excuses him from any obligation to seek further insight, stands as a barrier permitting no book to reach his soul and arouse it. It is, of course, to be feared that writers of spiritual treatises fail to take this attitude into account. They overlook it as an obstacle to their own success and fail to overthrow by charm of style, freshness of treatment, and prudent originality, this barrier which hinders access to the soul of the priest.

There are not a few priests who unconsciously advocate a false point of view in judgment of spiritual literature. They see everything that they read in the light of its value for sermons or controversy. Now a sermon book is not primarily a spiritual treatise. It is that in only a secondary sense. Its main purpose is to enable a preacher to preach a sermon, if he has

need of that kind of assistance. On the other hand a spiritual treatise written to the soul of the reader and not to the mind of the preacher is not a sermon book. It should not be judged as such. It may, it will undoubtedly, contain much material that is helpful to the preacher. But any priest who judges spiritual literature from the standpoint of its value to him as preacher will never understand spiritual literature at all. Its purpose is to strengthen our sense of duty, to clarify our spiritual ideals, to acquaint us with the methods and symptoms of supernatural life, to reveal the subtle processes of sin and sharpen our ears to the footsteps of angels and the whisperings of God Himself. To judge literature which has this mission, as a storehouse for sermons, is misleading to the last degree.

There are priests who do not know what kind of spiritual literature they need. They are spiritually minded and are acutely conscious of that margin of soul life that is wider than parish ministration. But they understand neither their temperament nor their needs nor their possibilities of spiritual growth. Lack of thorough but unworried self-knowledge prevent them from looking for and finding the types of spiritual treatises which will quicken their faculties and bring to them light and peace. The habit of books is good. The habit of good books is excellent. But one should know what one wants and one should have that personal standpoint in selecting literature which reveals both the taste and the power through which the soul lives.

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One should find one's masters and teachers somewhere in spiritual literature and hold to them with unyielding appreciation. There are many who are repelled, if not discouraged, by the point of view from which much spiritual literature is written. There may be too much argument. Emotions and feelings care little for the pathways of logic. There are many types of readers whose souls cannot be fed by argument. A syllogism chills emotion. Argument does not edify. Does Newman not tell us that a conclusion is not necessarily a conviction? A soul that could be conquered by an appeal to feeling or inspired by a spiritual picture or thrilled by a touch of good example might withstand a regiment of syllogisms and be unmoved. One can "feel compunction" as well as "know its definition." This shows how necessary it is that the priest find the kind of literature which helps him, and that he waste no time on such forms as leave him unmoved or confused.

We may set aside the types of priest already alluded to and take up for the moment those who do live and wish to live a rich spiritual life, and find their greatest joy in so doing. In respect of them we find that average human traits and certain characteristics occasion minor difficulties which it is worth while to mention.

All thought and feeling gravitate toward conversation. Naturally, then, spiritual thought and feeling should of themselves appear somewhere and at some



time in our priestly conversation. We have, however, practically outlawed the soul and its interests from the world of conversation in a way that hampers spiritual development. Ordinarily our interests govern our conversation because they control both feeling and aspiration. Topics which engage our sympathy and hold our attention drift inevitably toward expression. Conversation should be fundamental in the spiritual life as it is in social intercourse. It is the outer flowering of the inner life. It is based on what we like, what we are doing, what we aim at, what we dislike, what we think and hope. A noble thought stated in worthy language is a flower sent up from the soil within, just as the fair rose proclaims the generous earth from which it draws its life.

We have eliminated the soul and its experience from clerical conversation. This condition reacts upon us, dulling spiritual insight, reducing the power of spiritual emotion, and diminishing interest in the literature of the soul. In other walks of life experience gives authority to judgment and lends charm to conversation. In clerical circles spiritual experience does neither. There is an abundance of ecclesiastical talk among us, but there is little spiritual conversation. Intimate friendships among good men always gravitate toward a spiritual basis. They are drawn to one another by moral and spiritual affinity rather than by any other. St. Thomas teaches us that friendship's basis is virtue and conversation is its normal outcome. One of the supreme charms of

friendship is that friends escape the chilling restraints of social conventions as well as the privacy that good taste generally imposes and "air their souls" to each other with refreshing candor.

Spiritual literature suffers to some extent when writers are careless as to style. One may become weary of the word perfection and of verbal descriptions of it without in any way being traitor to spiritual truth. Perhaps certainty in the possession of truth and assurance as to the value of teaching it in any style have made us indifferent to the charms of literary excellence. It may be that God did not create us with an innate longing for polished phrases, but assuredly He gave us capacity to love and enjoy those charms of style which culture has discovered and perfected, charms by which truth makes appeal to wayward human hearts. Would that we might know the number who have found refined style a channel of grace and have opened their hearts to the visitation of God when their minds were first attracted by the dress in which truth was clothed. Have they erred who ascribe much of the power of the English Bible to the English of the Authorized Version? If involved sentences, abstract terms, and the rigidities of logic can repel us, may we not believe that truth is not unwilling to make style its handmaiden in coming to us as messenger of God? Phrases that linger and merge into haunting echoes, rhythm of sentence that is as sweetest music, delicate touches that show understanding and sympathy hold

one enslaved to a volume whose style is thus adorned and give to it an appeal to which its truth alone might not lay effective claim. Perhaps this is a national not personal fault. We have not cared about style. Our preaching suffers no less than our literature in this regard. Perhaps we have known Latin so well that we have failed to know our mother tongue as we should.

What has been said relates primarily to spiritual literature and to our attitude toward it. But there is something deeper than this. It is our relation to spiritual truth itself.

There is in the human heart an instinctive fear of the responsibility of knowledge. We do not sin except against the light. There is no moral responsibility except that which comes with knowledge and power. Every addition to the clearness of spiritual vision and certainty of the judgment of conscience lays upon the soul new responsibility in the terms of which God's judgment of us is declared. St. Paul had not known sin save through the law. We are pledged by increase of knowledge to higher degrees of self-discipline, to deeper loyalty to the law of God, to new subjection of everything temporal to what is eternal. May we not suspect, then, that subtle fear of the responsibility of spiritual knowledge may slow down the eagerness of our desire for it? Did Francis Thompson speak for each of us when he wrote

Yet was I sore adread,  
Lest, having Him, I must have naught beside.

May it not be that our indifference to spiritual literature, our complaints about lack of charm and method of treatment are symptoms of latent fear of spiritual knowledge rather than of serious judgment of the channels by which it is conveyed to us?

There is a tidal movement of the human mind away from what is commonplace and obvious, toward what is new and striking. The commonplace arouses no zeal, wakens no interest, furnishes no unaccustomed sensations, and stirs no enthusiasm. Now the subject matter of spiritual literature is commonplace, perhaps obvious. God, the soul, duty, self-discipline, virtue, sin, self-deception, self-indulgence, death, judgment, Heaven, Hell, are commonplace topics to humanity. Everyone has views about them because everyone has heard these terms since childhood. They are intertwined with every remembered experience of life. These great truths which are in the foundations of the world do not become commonplace to great souls, but they do become commonplace to superficial souls. Robert Underwood Johnson has complained with good reason of "the restless inability to base one's content upon the great, simple and noble things common to human nature as expressed in literature." "A swarm of writers are trying to find some new path to Parnassus other than that which has been trodden plain by the feet of them that bring good tidings, the great poets of the world. To be bored by essentials is characteristic of small minds."



Spiritual literature has to overcome this tidal movement of the human mind away from the commonplace essentials of life in order to gain a hearing for spiritual truth. If the average reader thinks that he knows as much about God and duty, sin, virtue, Heaven and Hell, as an author who discusses them, and this happens only too frequently, how is he to be helped by the writer? Only when style, freshness of treatment, insight, and discrimination guide the latter, can he hope to impress the former. Hence there is imperative need for a kind of merit and power in our spiritual literature which will overcome this handicap. The baleful charm of heresy is in its newness, not in its doctrine; in its freshness of protest and originality of manner, by no means in the merit of its thought. Are there not many who think that they find in treatises written by non-Catholics a freshness and charm for which they say they looked in vain along the safer pathways of orthodoxy? Is not the charm in question due almost entirely to our unconscious love of originality, to the appeal of a new point of view, to new statement and new interpretation? We find, then, if these considerations have any force, that we must undertake to clothe the fundamentals of spiritual life in such a way as to make appeal in spite of our familiarity with them. This conclusion is fundamental as regards the human appeal of divine truth. But at this point we meet a difficulty which is disconcerting in the extreme. How shall one be original and orthodox?

Truth is truth. It is neither what we make it nor what we wish to make it. We recognize gratefully that the Church must safeguard the deposit of truth and interpret to us, in consonance with it, our spiritual experience. We would be sadly at a loss if all who wrote might write as they pleased concerning the spiritual life. We see the sad consequences of such liberty in the moral confusion which now envelops the world. The Church reserves to herself the right to approve or reject all discussions of revealed truth and spiritual life undertaken by her children. In seeking therefore to be original and interesting in the discussions of spiritual life, we must be orthodox and obedient to the Church's guidance. Ordinarily the task of authorship is self-imposed. If an author seeks freshness at the expense of orthodoxy, we wish to have nothing to do with him. If he seeks to be orthodox and is careless of every other consideration, he but adds to the monotony with which much spiritual literature is weighted down. Now the Church has in mind not alone orthodoxy but as well a certain kind of foresight for all souls, and sympathy for timid souls. Newman calls our attention to that foresight of the Church in opposing hurried, abrupt, violent change in thought because of the confusion and misery into which unlearned and narrow-minded men might be thrown.

Fear of offending against orthodoxy has undoubtedly stilled many a pen. Adverse judgment of Church authorities has prevented vast quantities of litera-

ture from appearing. The *Censor librorum* is the author's friend no less than the reader's. On the other hand, the difficulty of being interesting and orthodox at the same time may be alleged by many as an excuse for being simply orthodox. But, after all allowances have been made, we have still an abundant spiritual literature which satisfies every standard of literary excellence as well as orthodoxy. There is not a type of spiritual problem harassing a human soul which has not been anticipated and dealt with helpfully in our literature. There is not a subtle form of self-deception nor an insinuating disguise of sin that has not been laid bare in all detail for the reader who seeks that knowledge. There is not a type of aspiration of the soul that is not catalogued, nor a quality of spiritual experience that has not been preserved, nor a noble ideal of life, duty or sacrifice that has not been set forth in radiant charm. All of this awaits and rewards the search of him who would possess it and possess his soul by means of it.

Spiritual literature is a portion of all literature. Clerical imagination tends to overlook this fact and to set apart the former as separate in spirit, purpose, and constitution. While a certain distinction may be made, spiritual literature remains subject to the laws of refined human taste and the canons of literary excellence. Is it not surprising that, since all priests are compelled to be familiar with classical literature, few seem to gain and retain a sympathetic under-

standing of the human, moral mission of literature in general? Is it not exceptional to find among us those to whom the classics give insight into the passions of the human heart and the processes of virtue and of sin? If Ruskin could trace no little of his moral vision of the world to his familiarity with the Latin and Greek classics next after the Bible, might we not ask in our own ranks a more thoroughgoing understanding of them? Great poetry, great fiction, great biographies, great orations, all exceptional outbursts of noble moral passion and refined aspiration, sifted out of the centuries by the discriminating hand of history, have a moral mission. They express and record noble aims, great ideals, interpretations of the infinite complexities of life, the penalties and the compensations around which Divine Providence organizes human action. All enduring literature springs from the gift of insight into human motive and the moral conflicts fought out in the remote fastnesses of the soul. Literary genius explores the recesses of the wayward heart of man, the springs of passion, the secret of action, the impulse of expression, and the symbols of vision and power. As Morley well says, the classic explores and charts the intricate movements of human feeling and emotion, the inspirations that rise and fall in the human breast and shape the outward course of history no less than inward life. Great literature develops imagination and sympathy, sharpens our moral sensibilities, which are the sentinels of all virtue, and stirs great longings



in the human soul which lead us toward our peace. Great literature preserves to us wise thought, exalted feeling, pure moral passion, spiritual insight, and great example. Literature is great in proportion as its appeal is simple, universal, and refining. It corrects and guides all of the substantial judgments of life. It helps us to peer beneath social conventions, illusions, customs, metaphors, the reticences of culture, and the mistakes of popular judgment, and discovers to us beneath these the processes of reward and punishment as God ordains them in the government of the world. It is one mission of this literature to show us that the laws of our being are the laws of God and that there is no wisdom except in conforming life to their sure direction.

Who, then, more than the priest should understand the moral mission of all great literature or be familiar with the giant figures in its history. One of the wisest priests whom the American Church has known, said frequently in conversation with friends that his deepest insight into the human heart and the mysteries of its operation have been won through careful reading of great fiction. Now if our priesthood were conspicuous for sympathetic understanding and wide knowledge of all great literature, for wisdom that rests on it and a searching knowledge of the human heart that proclaims it, we might believe that indifference to spiritual literature is due to its faults and not to its function. But if we find that priests are not conspicuous for critical knowledge and apprecia-

tion of the moral value of literature in general, we may expect to find analogous indifference to even the best spiritual literature that we possess.

An aroused spiritual sense would transform the world for us. This sense should express the appeal of spiritual taste and the preference of a cultured mind, distinct from but not independent of doctrine, routine and ministry in parochial life. He who can find food for meditation in a single line of a poem, real joy in a great thought nobly expressed, happiness in any form of spiritual or moral beauty, finds life enriched at every point. He who discovers and follows the deeper thought that inspires any piece of great literature has the gift that enables literature to perform its complete function in his life. All of this experience, refinement, and joy waits upon the spiritual outlook of life and the understanding of the uses of literature of whatsoever kind in life. A priest may have a literary sense without spiritual sense. He may have a spiritual sense without literary sense. But when the gifts are combined, he is blessed in his capacity for happiness and in his power of influencing human lives and leading them to God.

An American once made a trip through South America for the purpose of locating and purchasing gold mines. He was accompanied by an expert mining engineer. In the course of their search they crossed a turbulent but shallow stream at the base of a rugged mountain. The engineer sat on a rock in the midst of the stream and made estimates as to

the difficulty and expense of exploring the mountain to determine whether or not gold-bearing rock might be found in the neighborhood. His conclusion as to difficulty and expense was discouraging in the extreme. But the American who employed him asked him to look at the rock upon which he was sitting, and pointed out to him unmistakable signs of gold in abundance at his feet. In the same way we sometimes fancy that the truth upon which our souls must feed in seeking God is remote, inaccessible, elusive. It is, however, about us, within our reach at all times, if the heart desire it and really long to find the God in whom we live and move and have our being.

## XI

### THE COURTESIES OF LIFE

THE courtesies of life occupy a place among the gentler social forces that lead us to feel, think, judge, and act alike concerning the more delicate features of social intercourse and individual happiness. These courtesies, which all fine natures recognize and respect, indicate lines of social behavior and feeling which we should follow for the sake of harmony, peace, and refinement. They are not looked upon as optional or haphazard by cultured men. They have dignity and authority derived from their function in the maintenance of social order. Men and women of gentle culture and fine social perceptions recognize the authority of these courtesies as readily as they recognize the power of institutions or of the moral law in directing speech, action, and feeling. There is no sanction behind them except in one's self-respect and fine idealism. A gentleman who respects the courtesies of life will apologize for an unintentional wrong as readily as he will pay his taxes. He is not conscious of any difference in the two cases, although in the former only his self-respect compels him. A man who is not a gentleman may pay his taxes, but he will not make an apology. The law demands the payment of taxes, but only the courtesies of life demand the apology.



There are some fantastic persons who attach all importance to the courtesies of life and little to the essentials of behavior. They are scrupulous in the nicer forms of social intercourse while lacking respect for the common moralities. With these, of course, we have nothing to do. We should take care not to be found among those who ridicule the courtesies because some are found from time to time who respect them but show no regard for the elementary moralities. There are, on the other hand, self-sufficient men and women who, lacking finer social perceptions, respect the moral and civil law but ignore and scorn the courtesies. As a matter of fact, the courtesies of life are sentinels of virtue. They express and foster good taste. This is a real service to society, since, as the French say, bad taste leads toward sin. It is surely worth while in this vale of tears to protect the spirit of fine unselfishness and thoughtful self-discipline which smooths our pathways and shields sensitive hearts from pain and misery in the rough and tumble of everyday existence. This is in general the work of the courtesies of life.

Their first function is to repress the more subtle forms of selfishness. Every strong life is filled with selfish impulses. Selfishness may be fine as well as coarse, subtle as well as obvious, unconscious as well as conscious. It is selfishness that leads one, perhaps unconsciously, to monopolize conversation, to make known one's superiority or seek to attract and hold attention in a social gathering. It is subtle, selfish

instinct that leads one to speak disparagingly of others, particularly if the disparagement redounds to the speaker's glory. It is selfishness which leads one to delight in dramatic narratives in which one is the central figure. Neither institutions nor laws nor courts can hinder this kind of conduct. It is the business of the courtesies of life to do so, because they discipline our selfish impulses and lead us to endeavor to set others forward while we remain in the background. Self-assertion, self-aggrandizement, aggressiveness, rough speech that is associated with strength and efficiency, are extremely annoying to those who observe them. They cause the timid to remain silent. Gentle natures bear with such things in quiet patience. At any rate, this kind of selfishness upsets the social equilibrium out of which peace and good order and joyous social intercourse result. They who have a fine sense of the courtesies of life are led by habit and imagination to think constantly of others, to wish to enhance others, and to yield to them in any way that will set them at their ease and permit them to feel their value in any gathering. Even within the sphere of legitimate self-assertion, the courtesies of life will tone down one's emphasis, modulate one's voice, and moderate claims to recognition or distinction. They impart a fine spiritual atmosphere to life and make up the spiritual charm of a gentleman.

The second function of the courtesies of life is to hinder us from occasioning embarrassment, pain, or

humiliation to others. The impulse to jealousy and the stirrings of competition are organic parts of our constitution. The courtesies bid us check such impulses and keep in mind constantly the thought of others. They forbid us to inflict pain without necessity, to occasion humiliation, to force upon another any experience that brings with it a sense of diminished importance or shame. Kindliness and thoughtfulness find their happiest expression in the courtesies of life. Sarcasm, ridicule, cunning, rude speech, curtness, taking mean advantage of another, are banished from any heart that sincerely respects them. Thus we see that the courtesies are the fine flower of the Christian charity. At this point at least, their functions are practically identical. Of course, the natural motive of the courtesies is not as exalted as the supernatural motive of charity, yet charity makes the courtesies the vehicles of its expression. Both have as a mission the suppression of the finer social cruelties, the sparing of the feelings of others.

A third function of the courtesies of life is to encourage the impulse toward unrequited and unheralded service for others. They direct us to perform many hidden actions for the comfort and honor of others, not because the service is asked, nor because it is expected, nor necessarily because it is needed. The impulse to gentle and thoughtful service belongs to the integrity of a socialized and spiritualized nature. One is happy only when one may quietly and help-

fully serve others. It is almost impossible to trace out the motive that leads one to perform courtesies of this kind. The impulse results from a sympathy that becomes a talent no less than an experience, from a power of imagination which makes one see and appreciate the feelings of others more keenly than one's own. The courtesies of life enable us to anticipate the embarrassments of others and remove their causes. They make us keen in detecting little obstacles to the peace of others and lead us to remove them. The deeper Christian law of life disciplines all forms of strength to the service of weakness. The original impulses of strength are selfish. The great triumph of Christian civilization has been the enlisting of strength in the service of weakness. Wealth, learning, virtue, freedom, and genius have found their highest sanctity and noblest use in serving the weakness of sin, poverty, disease, misfortune. The courtesies of life take up the higher form of this consecration to weakness, directing the finer invisible relations and giving to the strong, enthusiasm and joy in their service. Gentle natures find their happiness in service of this kind, because the courtesies of life speak in the terms and in the spirit of the Gospel.

Another function of these courtesies—it may be merely a phase of those already mentioned—is to encourage the recognition of truth and of merit when they might not otherwise be known, or, if known, might remain unrecognized. Thus the courtesies become handmaidens to truth and justice. They



develop the prompt mental habit of seeing and declaring superiority and merit for their own sake without a thought of the bearing that that recognition may have upon those who give it. They discipline jealousy, selfishness, pride, dissimulation, and cunning. They curb our meaner impulses and help to hold us in faithful service to truth and justice. Reverence and deference to authority, respect for merit with the impulse to proclaim it, manly recognition of superiority in whose presence our own lights become more dim and our names are written in smaller type, are protected and even strengthened through proper understanding of the courtesies of life and respect for them.

Any exact appreciation of the social rôle of the courtesies leads us to use terms and to state principles that are found constantly in the spiritual traditions of Christianity. Christianity is essentially a social religion. It endeavors to govern social relations in the spirit of Christ. There is not a courtesy of life which shelters weakness, disciplines strength, suppresses selfishness, or stimulates thoughtful service of others and kindly deeds, which may not find its total explanation in the spirit of the Gospel and in the traditions of its interpretation. If this is true, those who share most profoundly the spirit of the Gospel should be keenest in understanding the courtesies, first in respecting them and last in mistaking their function or underrating their importance. When we scorn the courtesies, we take a false attitude

toward life. When we neglect them, we rob ourselves of a safe guide of feeling and behavior. When we discourage respect for them, we write ourselves among the less noble members of society and we frankly abandon ourselves to the intangible forms of selfishness. A cultured heart will never neglect the courtesies. It will find no secondary joy in life greater than that derived from glad obedience to them, because it feels that the mission of the courtesies is not distinct from the mission of the Gospel itself.

One hears it said at times that clergymen pay little attention to the courtesies of life. One would wish to think that this observation is untrue. While hoping that it is untrue, we may perhaps discuss with profit some of the situations in the clerical life in which the courtesies have an unmistakable mission.

#### THE COURTESY OF POWER

A priest has exalted authority among the faithful. The deep reverence felt for him on account of the sacredness of his priesthood is one of the most wonderful fruits of all Catholic life. The priest is associated in the sanctuary with the service of God. The reverence in which he is held is enhanced by the renunciations which he makes in order to serve God without reserve and to be a victim consecrated to the service and welfare of God's children. Ordinary human ties are broken and ordinary human consolations are surrendered in order that the priest may be

single-hearted and single-handed in the service of souls. He is looked upon as a superior man because of ability, training, and experience. He is looked upon as a sanctified man because of consecration and spiritual service. He enjoys extensive social authority over the faithful because of the many points of contact between religion and everyday life. Everything about the priest takes on enhanced value and enhanced power. Privileges of every kind are extended to him in such abundance that they would be confusing were they not inspiring. There is a marked inequality between the priest and the layman. The former has power with divine and human sanctions; the latter is conscious of a fundamental impulse to obey that power and to respect the priest who exercises it. The layman when in presence of a priest practically abdicates all claim to superiority or even equality, because faith, reverence, and tradition bid him to do so. What is the function of the Courtesy of Power in this unequal situation?

Of course, the civil law, moral and ecclesiastical law, public opinion, custom, conscience, and self-respect, govern the priest substantially in the exercise of this great power. This control is obvious and easily described. But the courtesies of life go much farther than these in suggesting to the priest the restraints under which he should use his power and the delicate consideration which he should give to the disadvantages under which a layman acts in dealing with him. Illustration may make this more clear.

The courtesies of life forbid a priest to lose his temper in dealing with lay people or to use abusive language or to talk in a loud and threatening voice in the event of a disagreement. When the priest behaves in this manner, he takes cruel advantage of the very self-respect and reverence for the priesthood that dwells in the heart of the layman. One sometimes hears a layman remark, "I knew that Father X. was wrong, but I have too much respect for the priesthood to oppose him in public."

The habit of authority and power in the priest may make him intolerant of opposition and aggressive in forcing his views upon others who are subject to his jurisdiction. It may dull his capacity to see and understand his own mistakes in policy and action. When this happens, it is easy for the priest to develop a chronic dislike of making apology for mistakes. He will at times be disposed to carry his policies through in a high-handed manner against all opposition howsoever reasonable. It is not a pleasant experience for the laity to call on a pastor to complain about his policies. They are conscious of the disadvantage under which they labor because they will not lose their temper nor talk back nor push an attitude to the limit. Parents who call on a pastor to make complaints about the cemetery or the parochial school or the management of finances, experience acute anguish and nervous fear at times because of the intolerant opposition which they expect from the pastor. They believe that he is sometimes unwilling to learn,



to admit facts, or to assume that complaint against his policy could have any justification whatever. The laity, as a rule, have the feeling that they are at least partners in the business of the parish and that they should have a voice in determining its policies. The courtesy of power, if properly understood by the pastor, would bridge the chasm that sometimes occurs between them and smooth the way to the spiritual and social harmony on which all happy relations are conditioned. It is really difficult to defend the sense of finality in judgment and authority that sometimes establishes itself in the clerical consciousness. Not long since a priest was approached on a train by a layman, who, after introducing himself, asked if he might propose some questions. Upon receiving permission, the layman did so. He was a systematic reader. In the course of his reading and observation he had developed many questions and some doubts as regards doctrine and policy in the Church. He had on a number of occasions visited priests to ask information and help, but he had been treated with such discourtesy that he had all but given up his quest for information. At the end of a two-hour conversation both the questioner and the priest were fast friends and each was made happy by the experience. While such an incident is extremely rare, it may nevertheless have a lesson for all of us.

Let us take it for granted that a priest may and should discuss war, politics, baseball, literature,

theology, social questions, and the like. We must permit him to have convictions and to express them, to take an intelligent interest in current thought, and to take attitudes as these commend themselves to him; but he need not be dogmatic, self-assertive, or intolerant of differences. Tolerance of views, gentleness in expression, readiness to admit mistakes, frankness in confessing ignorance, generous credit for superior information or skill in others, are not only not inconsistent with the priestly character but are the best proof of right understanding of the courtesies which should hedge in the exercise of priestly power. No priest should compete with any layman unfairly. Only the courtesies of life will hinder him from unfairness on account of the advantages which his priestly office gives him. The priest who is not eager to enjoy "the insignificant supremacies of life" will not be intolerant in discussion or vindictive after disagreement or unwilling to be corrected when he errs. He will receive complaints about his policies and his government with gentlemanly reserve and in the spirit of love of justice and deep respect for those committed to his care. He will, as seeker of truth, lover of justice, apostle of charity and kindness, permit no form of selfishness to blind him nor will he be guilty of any form of refined cruelty against those who respect him and trust his office.

The priest ascends the pulpit to speak in the name of God. If he become abusive and personal, tyrannical and ill-tempered in the pulpit, he takes mean

advantage of his power and of the respect in which the congregation holds his office. His hearers are not permitted to answer him in the pulpit. He has a grossly unfair advantage when he becomes personal and abusive. A venerable archbishop was once heard to declare that he had no difficulty in understanding critics who called the pulpit "the citadel of cowards." He said that it was unfair to the last degree for a priest clothed in the cassock and wearing the symbol of his divine jurisdiction to take advantage of the shelter of the pulpit and give expression to personal feeling, resentment, or indignation unless these were inspired literally by the name of God and in the interest of His law. They may not be indulged in to coerce a docile and willing congregation to respect and accept a transitory whim. The courtesies of life should mount the pulpit and stand before the face of the priest, sentinels to watch his words and guide his feelings. They should prevent him from forgetting the dignity of his office and the reverence in which that office is held by those who sit at his feet to receive the message of God from his lips.

*Noblesse oblige.* Rank has its obligations. The courtesies of life proclaim them. Gentle hearts respect them. History tells us that classes have been destroyed by their privileges as readily as by their enemies. The priesthood is a privileged class. Its exalted station, its splendid exemptions, its rare powers, its superb prestige, may after all endanger the fine balance of life in the priest because of the

unchecked power that is placed in his hands. It will be a sorry day for the priesthood when we confuse our privileges with our rights; when we measure our dignity rather than our duties by our exemptions; when we prefer to command rather than to serve; when we permit self-seeking, narrow views, and a spirit of intolerance to cloud the divine vision and govern us in dealing with souls committed to our care. The priest must be a governor in his parish, but he need not be a tyrant. He must be master through the mastery of love, not of fear. He must assume responsibility, make decisions and execute them, but none of these duties should prevent him from being docile, just, kind, tender, and firm. The priest must raise money for works of religion, but God has not given him power of unlimited taxation of the property of the faithful. He must deal with cranks and fault-finders, but the wisdom and graces of his office should enable him to deal with them helped by the courtesies of life and his own self-respect, without bringing him down to the level of their methods or the crudity of their limitations. A priest must have policies in conducting his school, in managing his cemetery, in organizing worship, and in the upkeep of property, but he has no assurance that his wisdom is final, that his personal inspiration is alone worth while or that he cannot learn from the practical experience, common sense, and business judgment of those who pay the bills and bear the financial burden of upbuilding the Church.



It is difficult to be specific in a matter of this kind without appearing to be unjust or without insinuating that abuses are much more widespread than in fact they are. Whatever be the faults or the virtues of the clergy as a whole in the exercise of its royal power, the profound respect in which the priesthood is held is best proof of the happy restraints and practical sympathy under which priestly power has been used. Let it suffice to say that a moment's reflection on the function of the courtesies of life in the exercise of priestly authority will do no one any harm. On the contrary, it will cheer and reassure those of gentle heart and kindly ways and it will double the joy that they feel in being thoughtful, reserved, and fair in the use of their great power.

#### THE COURTESY OF OFFICE

Much of the power of the priest is derived from his renunciations. He is called upon to renounce family ties, to surrender in a way natural friendships and a large number of social liberties which are innocent in themselves and are happily enjoyed by the laity in everyday life. The priest must be all things to all men. He is a living sacrifice immolated for the spiritual regeneration of his flock. He is God's representative to each soul. The courtesies of his office require him to be all of this. They imperatively forbid all forms of favoritism, resentment, personal dislike, indiscriminate fault-finding, and social boy-

cott. A priest who allows personal resentments to exclude from the free and untrammelled use of his services any souls committed to his care, is in a sense really guilty of treason to his office. Not the coarser but rather the finer and more subtle forms of dislike, resentment, and exclusion are here held in mind. The supreme law of the priest is to sink his personal preferences in God. If he is selfish in his likes and dislikes and permits his resentments and attachments to direct his affections or govern his services, he has an entirely false point of view. Nowhere else in the world is the longing for equality more definite or are its rewards more marked than in the case of all of those who have equal claim on the time and energy, the services, attention, and love of a pastor. One who seeks social intercourse only with the cultured and well-to-do, and is obviously indifferent to the poor and lowly, will be far from following the example of Christ, far from understanding his mission to souls. A fine sense of the courtesy of office will lead the priest to obey the zeal which will make him all things to all men for the sake of God.

### THE COURTESY OF BUSINESS

Fortunately or unfortunately as may be, business cares are thrown upon the shoulders of the priest no less than solicitude for souls. The management of the finances of an average parish is tedious and exacting. Contracts must be made, buildings must be

erected, debts must be incurred, repairs must be provided for, growth must be anticipated, and purchases of sites for future purposes must be made. It is practically impossible to disassociate any longer finances from parochial management. Hence the average priest takes his place in the business affairs of his community. He is trained primarily for the service of souls. He knows theology better than bookkeeping and the forms of the sacraments better than the stock market. If the priest becomes a factor in the business world in spite of himself and with little chance for adequate preparation, he must know and respect the courtesies of business no less than its laws.

The roots of the courtesy of business are found in justice. A man should pay his debts: above all others, a priest should pay his debts. A man should keep his business promises: above all others, a priest should keep his business promises. The lower level of action fixed by civil and criminal law should be unthought of by the priest in his business dealings. A priest who neglects to pay his bills promptly, who makes business promises and then forgets them, who takes advantage of the respect in which he is held and wears out the patience of his creditor, has no understanding whatever of the courtesies of business as these are practised by good business men. A priest who would resort to excuses and subterfuges in order to delay payments or would express resentment at being dunned after having delayed payment, or would lose his temper and scold when a wearied

creditor threatened to report him to his bishop, would show very poor understanding of the courtesies of business, if he had any inkling at all of them. The general intention of paying a bill when one gets ready might satisfy a crude theology, but it would not satisfy the courtesies. A priest should wish to spare his creditor all embarrassment. He should offer him gladly such help as comes from the prompt payment of bills. When a business man with moderate capital cannot collect his bills, he is compelled to borrow. He pays interest while he is receiving none and he hurts his own credit because he is unable to pay his own bills. The average business man hesitates to dun a priest. Hence some business men prefer not to do business with a priest at all.

A priest wrote recently to a clerical friend, complaining of the "notoriously slack business methods of priests." A business man of the highest standing was heard to remark not long since that many business men dislike to deal with priests because these seem to lack fair appreciation of the processes, methods, and standards that must govern business relations. Now, a right understanding of the courtesies of business would protect us against much of this implied criticism, all of which is kindly stated and kindly meant. It is directed toward faults of method and not toward lack of honesty, toward a presumed indifference to methods which condition the even march of business in the modern world. Promptness in meeting obligations, faithfulness in keeping



business promises, gentlemanly tolerance of those who differ from us in business judgment, ought to be found in every priest. The priest ought to be noted for the high regard in which he holds the courtesies of business and the prompt respect which he pays to them. One who is abnormally touchy or sensitive, and takes offence easily, will cause much embarrassment to others in business dealings. The administrator of an estate on one occasion paid a large sum of money to a priest who was named as beneficiary in a will. The priest received the check, and cashed it, but failed to complete the business transaction by acknowledging its receipt. Some time since, two boys who had been students in a Catholic college and had entered business hopefully, called at the college to ask that their firm be permitted to secure part of the trade of the college. The young men stated their mission in customary business form, as they did every day in dealing with business men. The priest to whom they were speaking became angry, told them to mind their own business and informed them that he would place his business when and where he pleased. At a loss to understand this rudeness, the two young men returned to their office and reported the incident to the manager. He took up the matter and demanded an apology from the priest. Not the offender, but another who spoke for him, made the apology. A sufficiently wide acquaintance with business methods, average willingness to be guided by them, and disciplined self-appreciation which

prevents us from suffering through excessive dignity, will enable us to understand the courtesies of business and will guide us in respecting them. There is no priest whose efficiency will not be promoted and whose happiness will not be advanced in doing this.

### THE COURTESY OF LETTERS

A generation ago, children were taught that every letter not insulting, merits a reply. The evolution in letter-writing that has occurred since then compels us to modify the principle, although it does not encourage us to forget it. Constant movement of population from city to city separates friends and scatters members of families. Letter-writing replaces association and the post office becomes an organic part of all friendships and of the family bond. Aptly indeed, the architects placed this inscription over the entrance to the Washington Post Office:

Messenger of sympathy and love  
Servant of parted friends  
Consoler of the lonely  
Bond of the scattered family  
Enlarger of the common life

The complex relations of business, multiplied by wonderful facilities of transportation and communication, have occasioned enormous expansion of business correspondence. The volume of business letters has become so great that genius has been called upon to devise methods of so filing letters that they may be found when wanted. Every kind of business

resorts to letter-writing as a form of advertising. Inquiry by letter has become a standard method of research among scholars and public officials. The letter has become the recognized channel of communication between officers and members of organizations in even the same city. All kinds of philanthropic work are supported by contributions sent in answer to appeal made by letter. The growth of letter-writing forced us to abandon handwriting for the typewriter. It compelled us to pass on from the typewriter to the multigraph, and from the multigraph to the printing-press which turns out letter forms by tens of thousands. A large percentage of letters fail to receive any kind of reply. In order to overcome that difficulty, we began to enclose addressed envelopes for reply. When this method proved ineffective, we began to enclose stamped addressed envelopes for reply. Where even that method fails, we enclose stamped postal cards or envelopes with a printed form of reply on which the recipient has but to write "yes" or "no." But even this method reports a high percentage of failure. The most ingenious device that occurs to mind is that by which we tell the recipient of a letter that in the absence of a reply from him, we will presume that he answers our communication favorably. This permits nobody to escape. There will be no complete history of letter-writing which fails to take account of the number and size of the waste-baskets into which unopened letters are thrown. What are we to do

in the face of this avalanche of letters that rush in upon us?

The courtesy of letters requires us to pay prompt and courteous attention to personal correspondence. He who neglects his personal correspondence, neglects his friend. He who neglects his friend is unworthy of the friendship. There is a feeling that personal correspondence should be written only in long-hand, otherwise the intervention of the stenographer interferes with the intimacies of friendship. Business letters which relate to business obligations have a very definite claim on our attention. The courtesy of business no less than the courtesy of letters requires that we give attention to all such correspondence promptly and intelligently. Letters written to priests by virtue of their office as pastors should of course be answered promptly and with care. Letters asking about parish records, about actual or former members of the parish, about the poor who may at one time have lived in the parish, should be answered promptly and in all possible detail. The marvellous efficiency of the post office in either delivering a letter or returning it to the writer is such that we are forbidden to explain charitably, neglect of such letters by presuming that they went astray. Neglect of letters of this kind is gross discourtesy no less than an offence against standards of fine feeling and respect for one's office.

On a certain occasion a priest sent out five hundred letters to as many fellow-priests, asking for the names



of young men from their parishes who might be in attendance at a certain one of the larger American universities. The letter of inquiry was prompted by zeal in the interests of the faith of the students. Thirty out of the five hundred priests had the courtesy to answer. Hundreds of them had or could have obtained without difficulty the information asked. On another occasion a priest sent forty-five letters to men in public life, asking information necessary to complete a work which he was about to publish. The majority of the letters went to non-Catholic men in public life. Two of the inquiries were addressed to priests. Thirty-one replies were received, but neither priest was among those who felt that the courtesy of letters called for an answer. Perhaps few of us have failed to offend against the courtesy of letters. Usually all of us have suffered from neglect of it on the part of priests with whom we have had correspondence. A certain priest whose sense of humor is not among the least of his blessings, received the manuscript of this chapter before publication, because his criticism was desired by the author. The manuscript was mislaid and apparently lost. It was found, however, after a long search, under a pile of letters that the priest in question had neglected. He laughingly entered a plea of guilty and promised reformation for this offence against the courtesy of letters.

Letters of inquiry from scholars and students of various kinds who may not be known personally, should receive prompt attention when the priest finds

it possible to be of service. The writer of a serious letter, who gives us credit for being gentlemen, should not have his impression converted into an illusion. Perhaps it would be well not to be too dogmatic about the courtesy of letters. Our behavior will satisfy reasonable standards if we abandon selfish notions and lazy ways and take an impersonal view of letter-writing in modern life. There are certain kinds of letters, particularly advertising letters, to which we need pay no attention. There are other types of letters which should be neglected under no circumstances whatsoever. Between these two there will be found many other types toward which a priest may with propriety take an attitude dictated by circumstances. That attitude will be gentlemanly and creditable when it is dictated by a fine sense of courtesy. One must commend heartily a certain clergyman who, in an annual retreat given recently to diocesan clergy, devoted an hour to the serious discussion of the ethics of letter-writing as it concerns the priest.

#### THE COURTESIES OF SOCIAL INTERCOURSE

Of the courtesies of life there is no end. It would be tedious to attempt to pass them in review or to lay down with assumed self-confidence rules of behavior in the details of all walks of life. There are, for instance, the courtesies of personal appearance as it becomes a matter of concern to those with whom we associate. Whether or not we like it, the world at

large associates neatness in appearance with intelligence and character. Civilization asks the educated man, the leader, the man who has had opportunities for culture, to conform to certain accepted standards in personal appearance. Any feature of personal appearance which indicates indifference to the impression made upon others, and a defiant independence of the canons of good taste, hurts the prestige of those who offend in this manner as it embarrasses those who love them. Furthermore, there are the courtesies of hospitality as these concern both host and guest; the courtesies of social intercourse in general, and in particular those which govern men in dealing with women in all of the relations of life; the courtesies by which youth venerates age, and age respects youth, and the courtesies of travel.

The governing spirit of these courtesies is in the human heart. The practice of them without the spirit of them is vain and useless in the spiritual interpretation of life. The heart is not Christian until it understands the spirit of charity. Charity creates sympathy. Sympathy leads to understanding. Understanding enables us to see the place of the courtesies in the summing-up of life and it breeds the impulse which leads us to respect them.

## XII

### LEISURE IN CLERICAL LIFE

**L**EISURE has been called happily "The sabbath of the mind." From the standpoint of time it indicates hours or days when one is free from the compulsions of life in which time is disposed of not according to one's choice but rather as duty indicates. In this sense leisure is free time. One may follow taste or preference and do as one wills. One may write, read, think, or visit, as the whim of the moment suggests.

From the standpoint of the mind leisure indicates freedom from mental strain, a condition of undisturbed mental calmness free from hurry, nervousness, plan, worry, bitterness, resentment, and the like. The mind is at rest, passive, and in condition to assemble and interpret thought, impression, and larger purposes with the joyous consciousness of freedom. The prevailing mood is one of reflexion and interpretation of the experiences of life, of the values that control life and of the mysteries that enfold us. The lines that thought will follow when the mind is relaxed and character is fairly serious find their beginning deep in life and they take direction toward the things that seem most worth while. Aspirations,



purposes, and decisions that control the drift of life are passed in review quietly. When these periods of mental calm and quiet reflexion are sufficiently frequent to take on importance in intellectual life, we find that one gradually builds up what may be called one's personal philosophy. This is defined by Professor James as "Our more or less dumb sense of what life honestly and deeply means; it is only partly got from books; it is our individual way of just seeing and feeling the total push and pressure of the cosmos."

The mind in its full normal action tends to develop a whole outlook on life and to judge its parts as fragments of that whole. This is the essential note in intellectual culture. We deal with fragments of life necessarily. Business is a fragment; pleasure and study are fragments; professions, research, and even unselfish service of others, are but fragments of the whole of life which the mind normally endeavors to understand. Now all of these special interests and activities tend to take on exaggerated importance and to absorb interest and distort judgment. Nearly all men are partly victims of these mistakes. The mind normally rebels against them. When its powers are sufficiently developed, it goes up to the high mountain of reflexion from which it aims to get an all-inclusive view of things in which proportions are restored and values are seen in true relation. Divisions of time sink away. Thought and imagination sweep without hindrance across the world and one

meets intimations of immortality. The mind that has no time for reflexion, or, having it, lacks aptitude and will, remains victim of unreflecting ways and loses the sense of proportions which is the mark of real culture. A philosophic calm is the birth-right of every normally trained mind. The aim of intellectual education or perhaps cultural education is to enable a man to see the whole of life and to judge securely the value of its parts as these become objects of interest to him. Just as the collective intellect of the world aims to build up the fragmentary sciences into one inclusive philosophy, each mind tends normally to build its varying experience and insights into one personal philosophy. Until it has done this, it has not fully lived. This is done by the habits of interpretation and reflexion developed practically when the mind is at leisure. Regardless of the extent to which a system of philosophy is accepted, the personal interpretation and adaptation of it in life remain always tasks for the serious individual, which are performed in times of mental leisure.

The mind that stops with mind falls far short of the whole truth. God is spiritual. The soul is spiritual. All men are spiritual. Since it is by force of the spiritual element in us that we are destined to union with God, and all things take final meaning by their relation to soul and God, leisure takes on an essentially spiritual meaning. It appears in the process of normally developed relations between man and God. The mind travels past all

cultural planes, past tangible reality and the forces that control it, and seeks touch with transcendental truths. Just as all established religions have developed some form of mysticism, they have given expression to the great truth that the soul seeks ultimately an intimate personal experience with spiritual reality. The Church has always been solicitous concerning the authenticity of mystical experiences in the supernatural life. While these have been accorded under the providence of God to but few souls, they do indicate the ultimate point of spiritual development toward which favored souls have been carried by divine grace.

Perhaps it seems far-fetched to refer even casually to the mystical experience of God in a study of leisure in clerical life. But if the priest is herald of the soul; if he is the visible symbol of unseen and everlasting realities; if he is as the voice of God declaring eternal truths to souls, is it possible to discuss leisure in the clerical life without giving to it a spiritual note; without declaring that the normal priest who is spiritually minded will tend always in his times of leisure to go far beyond the planes of human culture and love to dwell among the realities of the unseen world? Free time, poise of mind, and calmness of spirit are of value to the priest in a lesser way in themselves. But their primary value is in this that they furnish opportunity for him to find his own soul and to know it; to find his God and love Him; to gain new insight into the mysteries of the spiritual

world and to find ineffable joy there and there alone.

Only the leisure that carries the priest into that unseen world is fully worthy of his destiny and graces. Only through the vision gained by it is he freed from the illusions of life which obscure the vision of the soul. He is enabled to peer beneath surface to substance, to catch the spiritual interpretations that reveal God and neighbor and self, duty and opportunity in their divine character. Hurry is taken out of the blood. Confusion departs from the mind. The deeper unities that hold the world together in spite of the waywardness of life reveal themselves. All mean feelings and unworthy ambitions; all confusion of lesser purposes and sordid aims are disciplined out of life. The soul finds peace, which is a foretaste of Heaven.

There is no consciousness of effort or purpose in this experience. We seem to be detached from life and to become observers of it. We stand on the banks of the river of life and watch its varied and turbulent flow without restraint, without motive, without intending effect. We live deeply and wonderfully in spiritualized leisure. Meditation and contemplation are related to it. They tend to become identical with it. Leisure is essentially contemplative and passive. Yet its gifts are without number and are priceless. We learn profound things from it, things not to be gained by conscious effort or directed intention. In this way leisure seems to give one almost



the touch of genius, two of whose traits are the fusion of all the faculties and knowledge without antecedents. "When I thought myself most idle, most was accomplished in me."

Leisure is the greatest of all teachers. In this passive unconstrained attitude through which the soul comes to its own, it surrenders all timidities, conquers baser instincts, throws off lethargy, pierces through the veil of illusion, and comes to the doors of the temple of God Himself. It confers upon us peaceful acceptance of life and patience with its mysteries, beautiful understanding of the divine harmonies that are the high law of all life, great achievement in the righting of character, widened understanding and wisdom, the poise which is the pure gift of God. It corrects our compensations and reveals the shallowness of things that control imagination and shape motive. In this way it becomes a minor kind of revelation which one can know and accept gratefully but never describe.

Nec lingua valet dicere,  
Nec littera exprimere,  
Expertus potest credere.

Leisure is the great emancipator. Only as we share its benedictions, even in moderate proportions, do we gain any sense of complete freedom which is of the children of God. As the Lilliputians tied Gulliver by a thousand tiny bands and held him captive, incredible giant as he seemed to be, life binds everyone of us at a thousand points, controlling speech,

standards, thought, time, judgment, and aspiration. We are slaves of business, even slaves of duty, slaves of power, slaves of social conventions, slaves of temperament, slaves of feelings which survive their occasion. All of this is inevitable in large measure. Orderly living and effective service of others are expected as we merge into the multitude, become parts of it, perform our duties and live socialized lives as parts of the mysterious whole. Most of the doctrines that underlie our morality relate to our obligations to surrender preferences and take appointed places in the complicated scheme of things. Now there is danger that we shall be overwhelmed by this process. Free time, leisure of the mind, and the recognition of the claims of the soul alone can save us. Effort cannot compel this. Good will does not promise it. No signs indicate its coming nor may precautions hold it. Yet every thoughtful man, certainly every priest, should aim so to live, so to pray, so to meditate and hope that soul and mind may be prepared to welcome the gifts of leisure when in the providence of God it is accorded.

There are wider bearings of this thought which should not be lost from view. It is claimed that democracy is builded upon individuality or personality. Civilization is tested by the quality of individuality or personality that it develops. Religion gives its supreme expression and makes effective law of the truths that underlie individuality and personality. The finest flower of culture is a noble

type of developed personality. Education has no aim that is independent of individuality and personality. Men themselves feel baffled until self is fully and nobly developed and expressed. Leisure then can hardly have any important function that is not in some direct way related to the higher development of individuality and personality.

Personality is individuality. Individuality is of the soul alone. The soul is separate, spiritual, distinctive, an end in itself. All things in life gain their value through spiritual bearings. Now the soul is unlike everything else that we know. The perception of it is gained only at the cost of effort and prayer. If leisure has any relation to our higher life and eternal destiny it must take on a spiritual character and be in some way related to the expression of the soul.

The soul is omnipresent, never suspended. It tolerates no neglect without penalty and conditions all true understanding of life and of its laws. It is supreme yet least in evidence, everlasting yet intangible, most easily harmed and most exposed to harm, in danger constantly from the subtleties of self-deception and the indirections of evil. It is timid, shrinking, fearful of life and of its distractions. Only in the silence and quiet of leisure does it venture from its hiding place and come into view.

One can be very conscientious and yet know little about one's soul. A priest can be very devoted to souls and scarcely understand his own. A priest may

live a busy routine life and avoid all opportunity to be alone with his own soul. There are many in this world who remain unwilling to "Sit alone in a room and think." This may be due to dislike of effort, to distaste for reflexion, to the habit of carrying many unsolved problems and to fear of self-knowledge that might force them to resolution. It may easily be an aspect of self-deception that takes on the color of sin. All of this may occur without any self-accusing thoughts. One may excuse this reluctance by the consolations that come from a busy life, devoted to the welfare of others and to the neglect of self. The Church has made a brave attempt against all of these subtle processes by insisting constantly on the clerical duty of meditation and spiritual reading. These are not ends in themselves, nor are they so intended. They show that the deepest traditions of spiritual life recognize the supreme claims of the soul, and the requirement of meditation and spiritual reading is nothing other than a requirement of enforced leisure which gives to the soul daily opportunity to express itself and assert its sanctioned claims upon time and mind and will. The annual retreat is similarly a recognition of the primary claims of the soul upon the time and mind of the priest. Its days are consecrated to self-knowledge, self-correction, strengthened resolution and clarified vision of the spiritual world. A busy brain is just as good a workshop for the devil as an idle brain. Spiritualized leisure is a most effective safeguard against these dangers.



Many of the spiritual and moral shortcomings of life may be traced to a subtle fear of self-knowledge, to unwillingness to face the real self, to call things by their actual names and sit in unsparing impersonal judgment of one's motives and traits. The habit of losing oneself in multiplied activities enables one to escape the hours or days of leisurely reflexion that might bend the drift of life back toward God. In this way, very often, a deceitful spiritual peace is obtained which is the peace of surrender and not the peace of spiritual victory. The cherishing of resentment, bitterness, self-pity, and self-seeking tends to kill the taste for spiritual leisure and to rob one of all regret for losing it. One of the supreme advantages of spiritualized leisure is that it is without effort or purpose. These advantages come by an illumination, not as the outcome of logical processes. Impressions, aspirations, and judgment assemble themselves in some mysterious process and one seems to receive spiritual insight rather than achieve it. All unholy fear of spiritual truth is lost. All shrinking from the discipline that safeguards higher interests is lost. Every lurking doubt that one's only wisdom lies in the ways of unyielding loyalty to virtue at whatsoever cost, is dispelled.

It is difficult to describe the spiritual advantages of leisure. One finds all of these high qualities of spiritual life among those who are extremely busy. When they are "recollected," as the phrase is, their souls appear to have gained the gifts of leisure. It

is difficult to describe leisure in the terms of time because it is an attitude of mind and soul that may be independent of time. On the one hand one may say that the highest quality of spiritual life involves the experience of mental and spiritual leisure. Yet a description of it must be typical or theoretical unless one makes a study of the persons who have enjoyed the gift to a high degree and whose lives show its operation in an attractive way. It appears to be a grace freely given following upon sincere consecration and intelligent industry in seeking to conform life fully to the divine ideal. The experience of it seems to confer a new quality of life upon mind and soul. This is displayed by a tone of gentle assurance, freedom from hesitation, prompt obedience to grace, and an independence against all attractions of the lesser compensations of life that play havoc so widely among us. Something of this poise of power is witnessed following upon great decisions. It is seen, for instance, when the vows are pronounced in the religious life, on the day of ordination of the priest, in the triumphant survival of a severe spiritual test, in a great victory over the harassments of temptation. All occasions of intense emotional experience that have spiritual bearing confer upon the soul many of the gifts that are associated with spiritualized leisure. Sometimes its presence is recognized by an undefined influence. An American man of letters who became deeply involved through financial losses was carried past his embarrassment by the kindly

intervention of a capitalist who at that moment was under attack widely in the United States. The former said on one occasion when speaking of his benefactor, "The sight of him is peace." This may be said of the character that has gained the experience of spiritualized leisure.

Undoubtedly the contemplative life as described in our literature of the supernatural displays a full and wonderful array of these spiritual gifts. But that high type of spiritual life seems to be reserved to gifted souls which give themselves over completely to the absorbing service of our Divine Lord. It has seemed worth while to approach in the direction of that exalted ideal without any pretence of describing it or suggesting that it may be more widely enjoyed than one imagines. This interpretation of leisure in the clerical life was begun as a study of the disposition of the priest's time. The advance from the study of time to the study of mental leisure was natural, although unforeseen. The advance then from leisure of the mind to leisure of the soul was equally natural, yet equally unforeseen. But the original purpose remains. Again it seemed worth while to suggest to the average priest who is going through average clerical experience that the joys of leisure of mind and of soul await his industry and promise rewards to it. The priesthood as a whole ought to be able to share in some degree the wonderful experience of the contemplative life. It seemed worth while to base an appeal for that on a study of the circumstances

and opportunities of priestly life and to enable priests to realize that they err in believing that they are excused from all efforts toward a contemplative attitude because contemplation has been represented as too remote from them.

Leisure in the clerical life may be examined from the standpoint of time. In the case of pastors in small towns or country districts the problem of disposing of unoccupied time is extremely difficult. An absence of intellectual tone is to be noted in such communities. There is little if any apparent demand for the results of study. The pastor must remain within call on account of the ordinary emergencies of accident, sickness, or death. Nature seems to slow down mental activity when one's time is largely unoccupied. This problem is distinct for that type of priest. He is not for the moment held in mind. Pastors in larger towns and particularly in the larger cities are more apt to be busy than idle. The poor, those who have fallen away from the Church, the young, the middle aged, and the old, the sick, the demands of the community on the priest as citizen and leader present a range of claims upon the priest's time which make him a busy man. If we take into account the time needed for ordinary parish activities such as feast days, funerals, marriages, the preparation of sermons, we gain additional insight into the inroads that ordinary duties make on the priest's day. If in addition we keep in mind the time spent in receiving visitors, whether they be fellow priests,



parishioners, or others who seek advice or information; and also the time required for making visits as duty, courtesy, and propriety advise, we find the priest to be a busy man. If to all of these we add the time devoted to the parish school, to confessions; to the individual instruction of converts, to the complicated business affairs of the parish, the priest's day is pretty well accounted for. But he is required furthermore by the authoritative traditions of priestly life to spend between two and three hours a day in exercises of official and private devotion. The Mass, the breviary, spiritual reading, meditation, and other customary pieties can hardly be cared for with dignity and spirit in less than three hours.

Furthermore, the health of the priest makes it necessary for him to take exercise regularly, to be out of doors for one or two hours daily, engaged in some form of exercise and recreation that will keep health, temper, and nerves in good condition. No priest is benefited by a purely sedentary life. No priest can retain a wholesome and balanced outlook if he neglects the relaxation and exercise that are held by modern medical science to be necessary. Varied and exacting as are all of these demands on the priest's time, he could master the situation readily if it were possible for him to introduce rigid system into his daily life. It may be that nearly all priests could readily control sixty or ninety minutes every day in five, ten, or twenty minute periods. But leisure time must be consecutive time and under control if it is to serve

the real purpose of leisure. A business man accomplishes wonders within the eight or ten hours of the business day because he can introduce system and enjoy the service of elaborate office organization. But a parish house is not a business office. A priest is only secondarily a business man. Without doubt many priests manage their time badly. They could be much more systematic than they are. But if the priest is to subject his preferences to the reasonable convenience of parishioners, he must adapt the arrangements of his personal life to suit their own needs rather than his own preferences. So many of the priest's duties are occasional that he tends to develop a habit of awaiting the dictates of duty rather than that of controlling its calls. The priest who organizes his time regardless of the convenience of his people is hardly to be commended. A happy compromise must be asked under which the personal wishes of the pastor should be adjusted to the convenience of those whom he serves.

A story is told of a distinguished and scholarly archbishop now dead to the effect that on one occasion a poor old woman came to his house to ask his advice concerning a family quarrel. The servant at the door told the visitor that the archbishop was busy with study and that she could not see him. She came back on three other days at different times and each time she was told the same thing. On the last occasion she knelt in simple piety outside of the door and raising her eyes to Heaven said, "Dear Lord, when

you send the next archbishop, please let him finish his studies before he comes." The lesson is obvious. Whatever the difficulties in his way the priest should endeavor to gain control of some leisure time every day or every week at least in which he might enjoy all of the fruits that a cultured and spiritually minded man should be able to harvest from it.

The heritage of this busy and disorganized range of activity is carried over into the clerical mind. As the day is busy, though disorganized, the mind tends to be busy and to become disorganized. Disconnected activities break down the habit of concentration and dull intellectual tastes, while killing the habit of reflexion. The mind tends to take initiative only as circumstances prompt it. Taste becomes practical. Interest in history, scholarship, art, current social and intellectual movements is lost. The priest discovers that he can be very busy and very effective as a pastor without maintaining quiet interest in intellectual things. Crowded days, distracted though busy minds, loss of the habit of reading, develop positive dislike of the effort required by thought or writing. Even the reading that the priest enjoys is apt to be without purpose and without serious profit to him. Newspapers and many magazines are thieves of much clerical time. Even a wide range of superficial information to which one can attain may have no cultural or character value. This is a minor danger in clerical life. Facility in manipulating phrases and a graceful self-confidence

may enable a priest to talk well in public on many subjects and give him a most satisfactory reputation as a scholar. But this is not the highest form of mental power. Valuable as it is in many ways, it should not satisfy the longing of the priest for the quiet and attractive joys of the well-formed mind.

Habits of reflexion and interpretation are essential in mental leisure. Longing for the times of quiet when the mind is free, the habit of reviewing life and all of its mysteries, joy in seeking the deeper relations of things, and improved capacity for finding those relations and drawing lessons in wisdom and understanding from them, are reserved to those minds alone which have attained to a philosophic calm that is the gift of leisure. This development should be looked upon as the personal mental achievement of the priest. It is the expanding of life within him. While it makes him wiser, far more mature in character and infinitely more discerning in dealing with his parishioners, it is primarily his own personal development on the way toward fuller life that God intends us to enjoy.

But leisure in clerical life does not stop with the mind. It carries the priest into the invisible world, near to the spiritual realities of that world, God, his own soul, and the souls of others. The priest is the herald of the soul. He is the symbol of the invisible world, prophet sent to declare the tragedy of sin and the glory of redemption through which God regains dominion over will and life. The vocation, and



tastes, the training, the intelligence, and the duties of the priest should make the spiritual world very real to him. He should know his own soul and love its companionship. He should love the quiet hours that he may spend among the solemn mysteries of the invisible world, gaining but perhaps not searching mastery and insight into spiritual things. In as far as the priest gains insight into the high spiritual uses of leisure and enjoys its fruits, he will show forth his own achievement helped by the grace of God. No teacher can point the way, although respect for what teachers tell him can help much. The time and manner of his leisure will depend on circumstances and good will. No one can do much more than hint remotely at the insight that spiritualized leisure promises. What it means in discipline of character, in spiritual and moral poise, in glad surrender to the harmonies of divine life, in imperial command over faculty and inclination and in joyous assurance of the love and mercy of God, none can tell but those to whom these things have been given. "None of us yet know for none of us have yet been taught in early youth what fairy palaces we may build of beautiful thought—proof against all adversity. Bright fancies, satisfied memories, noble histories, faithful sayings, treasure houses of precious and restful thought which care cannot disturb nor pain make gloomy nor poverty take away from us—houses built without hands for our souls to live in."—(Ruskin.)

One priest might be mentioned who in former days

hired a horse and buggy and drove some miles occasionally to a solitary commanding hill where he found supreme happiness in being alone, remote from the turmoil of the city and in almost sensible contact with the invisible God. A certain layman might be mentioned who from time to time left the city by trolley and went many miles to a forest where he wandered alone among the trees just at sunset when the leaves began their whispered conversation with the evening wind. The thought of God so overwhelmed him, and his own soul became so real to him that tears flowed under suppressed emotion and he found relief in bowing his head and uttering the name of God repeatedly in reverence and prayer. Another layman might be mentioned who imagined God as with him constantly in almost tangible presence. He was as visibly conscious of that Presence and spoke of it with such joy and assurance as to be a constant source of admiration and even reverence to men of every faith and of no faith. A friend of his once remarked, "I need no argument for the reality of the spiritual world and for immortality other than the spirit and vision of him."

These are perhaps extraordinary instances. They seem to help, however, by showing the individual ways in which this spiritual insight may be vouchsafed to those who place no obstacles in its way and count obedience to the freely given grace of God as the first law of life.

It seems that the priest should recognize these

aspects of leisure as a problem of time and of mind and of soul. He should recognize that there is no fulness of life independent of the soul and that all of his achievements of whatsoever kind are achievements in the sight of God only in proportion as they help him to find his own soul and gain an outlook upon all life from its standpoint. This cannot be accomplished without intelligence and will and prayer. The atmosphere of the modern world does not help at any one of these points. The increasing complexities of life consume time and leave us with a sense of futility. These complexities tend to disorganize the mind and arrest its onward progress toward the discovery of the soul and the meaning of the soul in daily life. Whatever the duties of the priest and however exacting they may be, he may still claim the right to know his own soul and to gain some insight into the deeper claims of God upon his time and his mind that he may attain to the fulness of life which is of the soul alone. There is no other way to gain insight into "the secret and immense significance of life."

### XIII

#### THE ETHICS OF RECOMMENDATION

A RECENT work which displays no little learning contains the following reference to the habit of giving, indiscriminately, letters of recommendation. "The writer has never known of a worthless institution that was not recommended by a body of bishops, colonels, postmasters, mayors, doctors, and men that are usually credited with intelligence. The clergy are inveterate recommenders. It seems to be a singularly painful thing for a minister of religion to refuse a recommendation to a well-disposed professor that recounts the great good that he is able to accomplish." "Thus we have numerous persons with the recommending habit, and endorsing institutions that they know nothing about." This is not the first time that like views have been expressed concerning the quality and quantity of unreliable recommendations. That such reflections on the clergy should be expressed at all, is of no little consequence to us. That they might be uttered with any degree of truth would be a far more serious matter. The question is, of course, one of fact. It would not be convenient, nor is it for the moment necessary, to make an investigation concerning the



facts. A middle way may be followed by studying the general purposes of endorsement and by hinting at the principles which should govern us in making recommendation.

We sometimes give letters of recommendation because the need of an applicant and not his merit engages our sympathy. Imagination and sympathy often undermine discretion. Business men will give letters of recommendation to the undeserving because business pressure is brought to bear upon them and the refusal of the favor might do harm. We sometimes give letters of recommendation to men whom we do not know at all, because a mutual friend has asked the favor. When we can depend on the honor and intelligence of the friend, our action may be a real service in recognition of genuine merit. We sometimes give letters of recommendation in order to rid ourselves of the importunities of tiresome persons who refuse to understand our reluctance or respect our cowardice. We sometimes give letters to sinners who have just begun the work of reformation or who have merely promised to begin. We do this in questionable hope of helping them toward the restoration of character and the recovery of lost social standing. Letters of recommendation are sometimes given to undeserving men because of the distress of their wives and little children. And finally, we sometimes give letters of recommendation to men who deserve the best that the world can give. These letters are written in the light of full knowledge and exact under-

standing. They satisfy the most exacting standards of judgment and good faith. How are we to distinguish this last type of letter from the others?

Letters are at times written in a way which tells of the known virtues of an applicant but omits all reference to his known faults. This is a familiar and amiable device. Again, letters are couched in terms which will satisfy the insistence of the applicant without deceiving or misleading him to whom the letter is addressed. Letters are sometimes written carelessly because the writers do not expect them to have any effect at all. Possibly, our vanity is flattered when we are told that a letter of recommendation from us would mean so much. At such times we may find it a joy to indulge in amiable eloquence by recommending an applicant concerning whose merit we are totally unhampered by information.

Of course, such letters are not in any sense ideal. They are not manly, nor are they trustworthy. They are not only negatively futile but also positively harmful in a very real sense. Letters of recommendation ought to be judged and the writing of them ought to be governed by principles drawn from a number of sources. First of all, there is the question of personal morality. No lie should be written on any occasion. No partial truth should be so expressed as to intend deception. No misrepresentation as to one's knowledge or one's judgment can be permitted anywhere for any purpose. No one should fail in moral courage to the degree of offending against the

moral law rather than against the feelings of another person when the issue is squarely presented.

There is a duty of charity toward a neighbor which forbids us to expose him to the risk involved in unreliable letters of recommendation. Again, our own standards of self-respect require that any estimate which we express of a man's character and ability, either rest upon satisfactory direct information or at least sufficient indirect information. In all cases, a letter of recommendation which may offend by misrepresentation or mislead by careless judgment, offends against good morals and is therefore without justification. Finally, the letter of recommendation has become a social institution. It performs an important function in life. Much dependence is placed upon it. Hence the social, moral principles which govern letters of recommendation ought to be drawn from a study of their place in the complex organization of life. By means of recommendation, a man of standing and power lends his influence to another who is in need of it. This is a form of high-grade charity no less than is the giving of well-merited alms. A letter of recommendation written in good faith and with intelligent discretion, by means of which one in need is directly assisted, is a noble form of social service. In the complex structure of modern society, the act of recommendation takes on a supremely important social, economic, and moral value. It should be protected, therefore, by certain general principles of social morality whose force will be ob-

vious once they are brought to attention. That clergyman may be set before us as an example of reassuring candor and admirable common sense who wrote as follows to a fellow-priest: "I have a friend who is utterly worthless. Can you get a job for him?"

The recommendation of a deserving person, made in order to assist him, is, as was stated, a refined form of charity. We give of our social strength to him who is weak. Just as we forbid blind and indiscriminate giving in relief, we should forbid blind and indiscriminate giving of endorsement. Just as indiscriminate giving of relief enervates the recipient, the indiscriminate giving of influence through careless recommendation harms the undeserving by helping them and harms the deserving by making it difficult to help them. The letter of recommendation is in a certain sense a form of currency whose value depends on good faith. A counterfeit letter of recommendation is quite as disturbing in its own way as is a counterfeit bill in a currency system. In either case the presence of the counterfeit tends to undermine all faith in all letters and in all currency. If no undeserving man could obtain a letter of recommendation; if no man of standing would give a letter except in conditions which compel trust, life would be made much more simple for all of us and merit would easily find the instant recognition which it deserves.

In the simple life of small communities everyone



knows everyone else. Everyone knows everything about everyone else. Character, habits, associates, debts, assets, behavior, are known in practically full detail. There is little, if any privacy. The relations of life are simple and personal. Letters of recommendation have practically no place in such a community. There is nothing for them to do. The condition is totally different in a modern city. Here we can know but few intimately, while we are compelled to come in touch with large numbers whom we can know only superficially, if at all. Employers are compelled to offer positions to total strangers. Men who are unknown must seek employment from those whom they do not know. The most intimate confidences must be given and heavy responsibilities are entrusted when employment is given whether to friend or stranger. There is such opportunity for privacy in our modern cities that a man has little difficulty in remaining unknown if he wishes to do so. It is difficult to know a man's history, impossible to judge his character, impossible to know his debts or resources or associates. Employers of all kinds are compelled therefore to deal with strangers. Applicants for positions are handicapped, regardless of their merit, because they are unknown. Thus the letter of recommendation is an institution that society has created to enable us to find merit and trust it.

Recommendation replaces personal knowledge as the basis of confidential relations. Recommendation is the badge that merit carries when one seeks

employment, the badge that employers trust when they give it. In fact the importance of the act of recommendation is now so fundamental that we trust such letters on account of the writer's standing even when we do not know him. A priest may give a letter of recommendation to an employer whom he has never seen. The letter is believed through trust in the priesthood rather than in the unknown priest. Likewise, a public official, a university professor, a man high in the business world, may give letters of recommendation which will be trusted because we trust the position of the writer rather than the writer himself. Now, if men in positions of this kind are careless in giving letters of recommendation, confidence is shattered in the class as a whole rather than in the individual writer. An instance of this, which involves a most serious reflection on our leading classes, is found in the quotation which serves as a text for this study.

The phrase "letter of recommendation" is taken in a general sense. We may recommend by word. We may recommend by person or office. This occurs when a man in high standing permits his name to be identified with a business for the sole purpose of inviting the confidence of the public. Banks, industrial corporations, institutions, will seek out men of high standing for instance, and make them directors largely for the purpose of inviting confidence. The director in this case recommends the business by his

person or office. The history of banking in the United States shows us the sad consequences which sometimes follow when men of high standing and character thoughtlessly permit themselves to play the rôle of dummy director. We have next what we know as "letters" of recommendation. These are usually acts of friendship altogether without commercial motive. Finally, we have what may be called commercial recommendation—that is, recommendation erected into a well-established business which plays a fundamental rôle in the complex organization of modern business life. There are two conspicuous types of commercial recommendation—bonding companies and commercial rating agencies.

It is the business of bonding companies to recommend and endorse financially men who take offices of trust and responsibility in public and private life. The treasurer of a trust company, the cashier of a bank, a county or state treasurer, the executor of a will, must be trusted with large sums of money. The interests of society demand that we place in such positions only those who are entirely reliable. The task would be utterly impossible except for the institutions of bonding. We now have no need of personal knowledge of a man in order to trust him. When an applicant for a position of trust and power receives appointment, he applies to a bonding company from which he purchases a bond. The company sends its trained investigators to study the habits, history, home life, expenditures, recreations, and as-

sociates of the applicant. They search out his standing wherever he has lived. They inquire among his friends wherever these are found. After completing its investigation, the bonding company gives or refuses the bond. Its decision to give the bond depends partly on its study of the applicant's history and largely on the recommendations made by his friends. In giving the bond the company makes itself liable up to a stated amount for any betrayal of trust of which the applicant may prove guilty while in office. By means of this superb device, one's virtue, one's business integrity, one's personal merit when properly endorsed and recommended, serves as the basis of favorable judgment by the bonding company, and the applicant finds the whole world open to him on account of his personal merit. If bonding companies could not depend on the good faith and accuracy of the recommendations made in favor of an applicant, it would be impossible to conduct modern business at all. The bonding company takes over all of our worry. It is its business to seek out merit, to recommend and endorse it. The structure of the modern business world rests largely on the bonding company and the bonding company rests upon the varied forms of recommendation.

Commercial rating agencies perform a similar service in the world of buying and selling. Wholesale houses sell goods anywhere in the world. They wish not to sell to unreliable customers and not to miss or offend those that are reliable. As the world



of trade is organized, an enormous amount of buying and selling is done on credit, cash sales being more the exception than the rule. There is a chasm between the wholesaler in New York and the retailer in Omaha. They desire to enter into mutual relations involving large transactions to be done on credit. Neither knows the other. The chasm is bridged by the commercial rating agency, which makes it a business to recommend the unknown buyer to the unknown seller. Commercial agencies, such as Dun and Bradstreet, make it their business to know everything that can be found out about the character, habits, methods, associates and intelligence of the buyer. They sell this information to retailer or wholesaler, thereby making possible despatch and safety in business. By this benevolent institution of recommendation through the commercial rating agency, the small merchant in a western town who has character, industry, intelligence, and standing, is enabled to build up commercial credit and thereby to extend his business far beyond his cash resources. Unless the commercial agency may rely without fear on the verbal and written recommendations which it gathers, and unless the wholesaler may rest his business judgment on the estimates arrived at by the rating agency, the whole structure of modern credit would shrink to proportions which would paralyze trade. To a large extent, therefore, an enormous volume of buying and selling depends upon the judgment of the commercial rating agency, and its judgment in turn

depends upon the good faith of the recommendations which it receives.

In the lesser concerns of life the function of recommendation is equally obvious. It plays no less a rôle in hiring a housemaid than it does in employing a high-school teacher or a college professor. The process of employing teachers in our school system has created what we call teachers' agencies, which make a business of investigating teachers at the request of these and recommending them for positions where they are not known. The applicant gives a list of friends of standing from whom in turn the teachers' agency asks letters of recommendation. The agency then recommends or refuses to recommend the applicant. When a laboring man applies to an employment agency for help in finding work, he gives the name of his last employer, from whom a letter of recommendation will be sought before the applicant can find work. In fact the letter of recommendation follows us everywhere throughout the world like a shadow. It is as general as credit itself. Even in the smaller modern retail business which is based on credit, we find the rôle of recommendation supremely important. Merchants combine among themselves for mutual defence against fraud. They have black lists and white lists. A customer whose standing is good in stores about the city does not suspect that upon her first appearance in a store where she is not known, prompt inquiry by telephone is made before she receives credit. She names other stores wherein

her credit is established and only upon recommendation from one or more of these is credit extended to her. If recommendation is refused, the discreet clerk manages not to be able to find the articles that are sought. Here again the good faith of recommendation is made the basis of credit.

Further illustration is scarcely necessary. Human life is so complex, trust and confidence are so imperative and relations remain so impersonal that direct personal knowledge can not any longer serve as the basis of the more important relations in life. The institutions of recommendation have been established in response to the imperative demands of modern life. They have enriched life. They have multiplied its resources. They help to recognize merit and to circumvent fraud. When we trifle with the act of recommendation, when we neglect the fundamental principles which should sternly govern it, when we are guilty of any practice which undermines good faith in the word or letter of recommendation, we menace some of the dearest interests in modern life and do harm to a fundamental social institution. Possibly the great purposes of recommendation made in honesty and good faith will be more readily understood if we view them in contrast with a debased form of recommendation which has become universal.

Human nature has an unconquerable tendency to trust eminence. It forgets the obvious limitations of eminence in the obsequious pleasure of being guided by it. This trust in eminence is indiscriminate.

Advertisers know this and they take advantage of it to the utmost. Eminent prize-fighters, eminent baseball players, eminent opera singers, eminent beauties, eminent football players, find a ready sale and high prices for their letters recommending tobacco, face cream, soap, musical instruments, automobiles, and candy. The more thoughtful among us pay no attention, at least we think that we pay no attention, to letters of this kind. At any rate this commercial degradation of personal recommendation seems to pay the advertisers no less than the authors.

The letter of recommendation should be truthful and accurate. It concerns one's personal morality, one's common sense and self-respect. It concerns one's fellow-man to whom it is directed. He should be able to find the truth in it without difficulty and to place unreserved confidence in it. It concerns him in whose favor it is written. If he have merit, the letter should proclaim it effectively. If he have no merit, it should be impossible for him to obtain a letter. In the interests of justice no less than of truth, merit should find recognition easily. In the interests of morality, lack of merit ought to find it impossible to obtain letters of recommendation. If circumstances arise wherein in the interests of charity a letter is demanded, but personal information is lacking, one may venture to give a letter provided the limitations under which it is written are set forth with honest directness. Since the letter of recom-



mendation has become a fundamental social institution, the giving of such letters becomes a question of social morality. Unreliable and misleading letters shatter confidence in all such letters and inflict serious hurt upon the standards of social morality which are concerned. When such letters are given carelessly, they discourage excellence and encourage fraud. They confuse men of good standing and reassure men of no standing. They make it doubly difficult to convert industry, integrity, and merit into legitimate business assets. They make it more difficult for good will to discover deserving need and they encourage incompetence by shielding it from the penalties of its own mistakes.

All of us would be nobler and more helpful in the world were we to give up half-truths, cowardly yielding to indiscriminate sympathy, attention to the irksome timidities created by our business interests, and if instead we adopted a brave and straightforward way of giving and of refusing letters of recommendation. No thoughtful man will deny the hardship involved in refusing to recommend a man whose condition appeals to us profoundly, apart from his merit. No plea is made for coldness or cruel bluntness when this is urged. Very often there are many services which we may render to an applicant which would mean more to him than giving him an unreliable letter of recommendation. At any rate it will require but little thought for us to understand the fundamental rôle that recommendation plays in

modern life. Once we understand it, the resources of our character and intelligence should lead us to adopt such principles in making recommendation as satisfy the standards of personal morality, of intelligent charity, and of enlightened respect for a fundamental social institution. It was no candidate for saintship but rather an average business man who lacked neither honor nor courage on an occasion when he was compelled to give a letter of recommendation to a man whom he did not know. He had been annoyed by the applicant who failed to understand the courteous refusals which his repeated requests for the letter had met. When his insistence reached the point of rudeness and his stupidity began to take on the color of genius, the gentleman in question surrendered and wrote a letter of recommendation as follows: "This letter will introduce Mr. X. He desires to obtain employment under you. I know nothing whatever about him. I played football with his cousin when I was in college. I hope that you can do something for him and that you can find satisfactory reasons of your own for so doing."

Some years ago, a seminarian was about to be dismissed on account of habitual disregard for the minor regulations of seminary life. He asked the president for a letter of recommendation. The latter was reluctant to give it, but at last he yielded to the student's insistence. A truthful letter setting forth his limitations was written and given to him. He

read it and turning to the president, remarked, "Thank goodness, I can not be compelled to show this to anyone."

Problems of recommendation have particular interest for the clergy. The mission and experience of the priesthood develop in our minds a sympathy for weakness, distress or misfortune and an impulse to relieve it. The peculiar relationship of confidence and trust which exists between priests and people awakens quite naturally, among those who need assistance, an impulse to ask it from us. At the same time we are conscious that deference will be paid to any request that we make in the interests of those who need assistance. Herein lie both our strength and our weakness. The consciousness that we can help others by our letters of recommendation may lead us to give such letters with too little caution and with no thought to the harm that we may occasion. Our letters sometimes reflect more honor upon our sympathy than upon our judgment. Jealous regard for the prestige of the priesthood and conscientious protection of the confidence which we enjoy ought to make us scrupulous and prudent whenever we give a letter of recommendation. It is to be feared that we do give letters without sufficient caution and that we write them without due reserve of statement. The quotation which occasioned this article shows that our habits of recommendation are talked about and that we are not free from criticism. Inquiry

made among a number of priests brought forth the frank admission that we deserve much of the criticism which is made.

One inquiry was answered by raising the question of moral responsibility which may be entailed by a priestly recommendation. A pastor wrote as follows: "I have been asked at times to give recommendation to persons wishing to open an account with a store which sold goods on the installment plan. Mr. X. was a member of my parish. He gave my name to the credit man of the store. The latter asked me for a confidential report on Mr. X. He released me from responsibility for the account which X. opened. As a matter of fact X. left the city and did not pay his bill. Was I not in a moral sense, somehow responsible?" Another pastor answered inquiry as follows. "I never refused a letter of recommendation to anyone. Judging by the types of undeserving men who have brought letters to me, I think that many others have been equally generous." Fear of responsibility led another friend from whom I asked views, to adopt an interesting method, if not an ideal one, to meet such situations. He arranged with his influential friends two forms of letters of recommendation. When one form was used no attention whatever was to be paid to the letter. When the other form was used, the letter was to be received and acted upon in entire good faith.

Good-natured and whole-hearted men who find joy in serving others are exposed in a peculiar way to



persecution from those who have need of letters of recommendation. Blunt, direct, ruthlessly honest men are not bothered much by those who seek recommendation. The half-truths, suppressions of truth, reckless exaggerations, benevolent but uncritical estimates in which letters of recommendation abound should be conscientiously avoided by all of us in the name of self-respect, charity, and social morality. The letter of recommendation has a fundamental mission in modern society. We, above all others, ought to do everything possible to protect it and to make it serve its humane purpose. We should do everything in our power to serve merit and smooth the pathways of life for it. We should do everything in our power to circumvent fraud and thereby to discourage it. We should be governed therefore by exacting standards every time that a letter of recommendation is given. Not until the recommendations which we give in the name of charity equal in accuracy and reliability the commercial recommendations given in the name of business, shall we have taken the first step in clearing our name of the charge of carelessness. Not until our letters are found even more reliable than the others, shall we bring them up to the exalted level which will be worthy of us and of the confidence which is placed in our judgment and our good faith.













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